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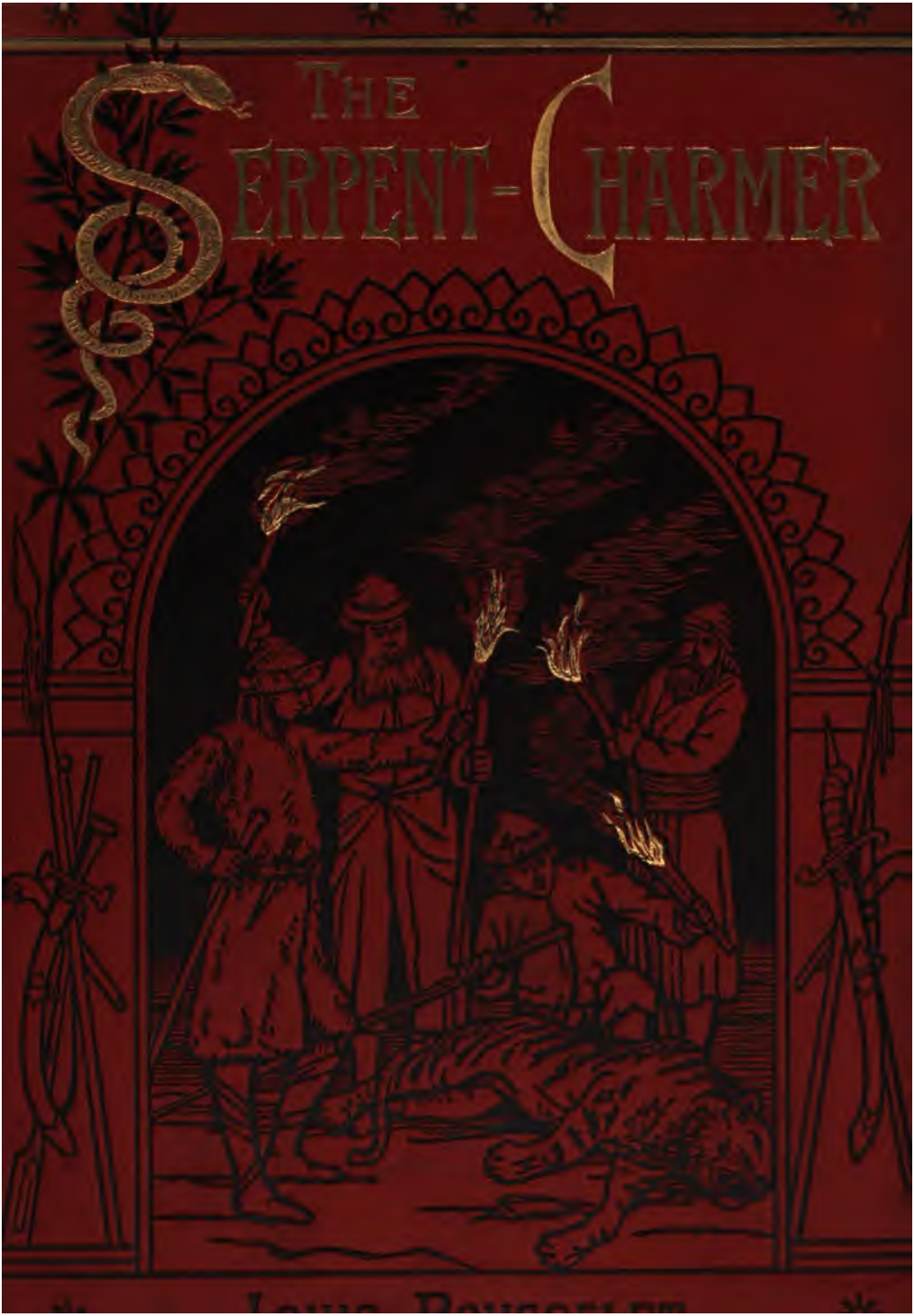
The Serpent-Charmer



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"I entreated him to slay me."

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THE SERPENT-CHARMER.

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By [illegible]

WITH 68 ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD BY A. MARIE.

[illegible]

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I entreated him to slay me.

THE SERPENT-CHARMER.

By LOUIS ROUSSELET.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

By MARY DE HAUTEVILLE.

WITH 68 ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD BY A. MARIE.

DEC '79
BODLEIANA

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

"On the Banks of the Ganges" 1

CHAPTER II.

The Bourquien Family 12

CHAPTER III.

The Queen of Serpents 26

CHAPTER IV.

At Home with the Prince of Bihtour 37

CHAPTER V.

Vengeance and Peichva! 51

CHAPTER VI.

The Good Samaritan 65

CHAPTER VII.

André's Education 72

CHAPTER VIII.

In the Jungle 84

CHAPTER IX.

The Festival at Nandapoor 95

CHAPTER X.

PAGE

THE HIMALAYAN TÉRAÏ 108

CHAPTER XI.

A DEAD CITY 122

CHAPTER XII.

THE CYCLONE 141

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH THE MÉTCHIS 153

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CARAVANSARAI OF MUSSOURIE 175

CHAPTER XV.

ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS 191

CHAPTER XVI.

ANDRÉ'S PLAN 213

CHAPTER XVII.

ESCAPE 230

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLIGHT 248

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN DODA 262

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW FRIEND 278

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
His body was bent beneath the weight of two large baskets	1
This silent struggle lasted for some moments	5
The young people were galloping across the country	12
The elephant, carrying the prince, stopped before the young people	21
Old Mali was looking affectionately at a beautiful black cobra	26
The tiger was rolling on the ground	33
The palace was a spacious edifice of pink and white marble	37
Taking the cup, he filled it with champagne	46
Approaching M. Bourquien, he saluted him with a ceremonious bow	51
As though struck by lightning M. Bourquien fell to the ground	62
The flames quickly had the better of the grand old factory of Gandapour	65
He placed André on his shoulder	70
He saw, with horror, that these moving forms were none other than serpents	72
André at once recognized the lad Miana	78
Springing over his stove, he dropped on one knee before André	84
"The pale light you see yonder"	91
He worked the boat with a vigour quite surprising in a man of his age	95
Taking an enormous python, he raised it in the air	106
The place which Mali chose	108
He threw it with force and precision	119
At their feet lay the beautiful valley of Amba	122
A vigorous blow on his muzzle quickly sent him back	128
Mali bowed respectfully to him	138

PAGE
The raft followed the middle of the current 141
Two of the elephants were engaged in a furious duel . . . 144
A moment later the wood was in flames 153
" Not one Hindoo has ever escaped alive out of my hands " . 164
Old Mali glided to the ground 169
The little band crossed the Ganges 175
Tin-to sang to his own accompaniment 186
André brandished the card before the eyes of the sentinel . . 189
Mali apologizes to Tin-to 191
The three men attacked the block of ice with renewed vigour . 205
The tiger lay motionless on the ground 209
Mali waved his staff 213
" I am Mali, the famous Nât " 218
They began to ascend the steps 224
Two guards of the seraglio took me by the arms 230
Bertha, kneeling beside her bed, seemed absorbed in prayer . 234
She was in André's arms 246
They were already far from Punderpoor 248
André gazed on the lovely face 249
" I entreated him to slay me " 256
Not a house had escaped the flames 262
Mali examined the corpses 264
Bertha threw her arms round the charmer's neck . . . 275
The captain continued the struggle alone 278
Doda's sword fell from his hand 280

THE SERPENT-CHARMER.

"His body was bent beneath the weight of two large baskets."

CHAPTER I.

"ON THE BANKS OF THE GANGES."

DAY was just breaking. Already the hazy light faintly marking the outline of the horizon announced the approach of a glorious Indian sunrise. The stars faded away one by one till the magnificent Southern Cross alone was left to struggle with the all-powerful sunbeams.

Not a sound disturbed the quiet of the pure fresh air. The jungle, which but now resounded with the noisy yells

of jackals and the dismal howling of hyenas, was silent. Its wild inhabitants were hastening back to their dens, and here and there furtive shadows glided rapidly through the underwood.

Absolute silence always marks the short space of time which alone separates the darkest night from broad daylight in India. No gradual dawn here, no slow transition; when the first rays of sunlight have fired the light mantle of clouds which act as vanguard to the sun, then only does Nature awake and seem to rally from the fright in which the terrible dangers of darkness have plunged her.

The sacred monkey, the *langour*, which the ancient Brahmins called Tchoubdar de Sourya (The Herald of the Sun), is the first to salute the dazzling orb with a guttural, prolonged "hou." At this salute, as though by magic, the wood resounds with a thousand cries, and the sunrise is accompanied by a deafening concert.

But no sound had as yet been heard. The bare, immense plain stretching far and wide was still dark and silent; one human being alone, an old man, was walking with difficulty along the road bordering the right bank of the Ganges. His body was bent beneath the weight of two large baskets, which, after the Indian custom, he carried balanced at either end of a long flexible bamboo.

From time to time the old man stopped for a moment to rest his burden on the ground. Then straightening himself up again he seemed to scan the horizon anxiously. The first rays of light casting a rosy glow over his bronzed lean body, scantily covered with rags, gave the traveller a

strangely fantastic appearance. He was undoubtedly some beggar wandering along the roads, and yet his emaciated features framed by a long white beard, had a look of haughty pride, worthy rather of a priest of one of the mysterious rites which divide the vast Hindoo peninsula.

Priest or beggar, the old man must have made a long journey, for he seemed worn out with fatigue, and his burden drew from him frequent groans.

He was thus walking slowly along, following the bank overhanging the Ganges, when he came suddenly upon a deep ravine, a kind of creek, which, separating itself from the river, ran some distance inland. The road, a simple towing-path, thus interrupted must for want of a bridge have skirted the ravine, the bottom of which was covered with stagnant water, and crowded with vegetation. Nevertheless the creek was but a few yards wide, the water seemed to be shallow, and a path scarcely discernible bore witness that more than one eager traveller had not allowed himself to be baulked by this slight obstacle.

Our stranger was undoubtedly not of this opinion, for the sight of the ravine drew from him a cry of despair, and, letting his baskets slip to the ground, he began to bewail his fate.

" By my divine Mother Parbati," cried he, "shall I never then reach the end of my journey! Since sunset have I been walking along the banks of the Ganges, S'ri Ganga! and it will be daylight before I find a lodging for myself and companions. At the crossing of the road to Cawnpore,

I saw a Brahmin reading his *slokas*[1] before the *déota*, protector of the road. I went up to him and humbly asked permission to warm my benumbed limbs at the fire before the altar. But he answered me in a haughty tone: 'Away with thee, unclean *Nât*, thy contact would profane the flame destined for the divine Karticeïa.' That man little knew my power; I could have punished him, but I had pity on him. And since then I have walked without resting, and now behold me stopped by this cursed *nullah*,[2] when I can see yonder an hospitable roof. O Siva! inspire thy servant. May I trust my feeble body in these dark waters, the abode of the terrible *maghar?*"[3]

But Siva making no answer, our friend, urged by his desire to reach as soon as possible the house he saw in the distance, resumed his burden, and, leaning on his staff, he descended the bank of the ravine with a trembling step. On reaching the edge of the marsh, he sounded the depth with his staff, then, again calling upon Siva, he bravely entered the water.

His feet slipped on the muddy bottom, the tall lotus stems impeded his movements, but notwithstanding these obstacles, the old man reached the other side. He had already set one foot on dry ground when the hideous head of an enormous crocodile appeared above the surface of the

[1] The sacred texts of India are divided into slokas, or verses.

[2] The word *nullah* is usually applied to a deep stream flowing between high banks; but the Hindoos apply it generally to all fissures of land of any extent.

[3] The *maghar* is a crocodile with triangular jaw, peculiar to the rivers of Northern India.

This silent struggle lasted for some moments.

stream; its horrible jaws, armed with teeth, opened, and snapped at the leg just out of the water. The poor traveller sank on the ground with a cry of pain, his baskets, thrown to some distance, flew open, and set at liberty a swarm of serpents of all colours and sizes, who rapidly dispersed among the tall grass.

However, the unlucky man in falling had clutched at a tuft of *kalams*,[4] whose tall stout stems bordered the edge of the *nullah*. The crocodile, astonished at meeting with resistance, collected its strength to draw its prey into the water. Urged by its voracity, it half raised its body out of the mud, and tried, by sharp tugs, to drag away its victim.

This silent struggle lasted for some moments; the old man, well-nigh exhausted, was visibly losing ground, when, suddenly letting go his hold, he turned towards his enemy, and taking its head in his hands, put out both its eyes.

The monster, roaring with pain, opened its jaws, abandoned its prey, and plunged back into the muddy water of the *nullah*, where it immediately disappeared.

Notwithstanding the horrible wound by which his leg was torn, the poor traveller hastily dragged himself away from the edge of the water. Before, however, climbing the steep bank which separated him from the plain, he began

[4] The *kalam* is a kind of grass which grows abundantly in Northern India. Its fine pliant stem has served from time immemorial as pens for the Hindoo scribe; the origin of the Latin word *calamus* may be easily traced to this source.

"I entreated him to slay me."

Page 256.

In vain the old man, taking his *toumril*,[6] which hung at his side, endeavoured to recall his serpents by all the seductions of music; in vain did he afterwards make them the most extravagant promises: the echo alone answered his words. At last he determined to take up his staff and baskets, and with difficulty he reached the top of the ravine.

The sun had risen, and its rays were burnishing the plain; not a cloud appeared in the sky. The old charmer had soon regained the road which he had so unfortunately quitted; but once there, exhausted with fatigue and pain, he stood still, put down his burden, and stretched himself on the steep bankside bordering the road.

It would have taken but little time now to reach the longed-for shelter, for at scarcely more than half a mile rose a spacious mansion, which it was easy to recognize as the dwelling-place of European planters. But his last efforts had been too much for the poor wanderer. Mournful, resigned, and overwhelmed with the weight of his misfortune, he waited for the help of Providence.

All at once the gay sound of flutes and cymbals roused him from his lethargy. At the end of the road coming from Cawnpore might be seen a numerous band of people, half hidden from view in a cloud of dust, which in the sunlight looked like a column of fire.

The troop passed close to the beggar. In front walked,

[6] The *toumril* is a short flute which Indian charmers use, and which produces a sound very much like the *binion* of Brittany, although much softer.

or rather ran, keeping time to the music, some young Hindoos, dressed in short silk tunics, their long hair flowing from beneath golden caps; they were playing gaily, some on the fife, others the *tam-tam* or cymbals. Following them came a score of horsemen, glittering with gold and armed with lances with scarlet pennons, surrounding a superb elephant, richly caparisoned and carrying a *haodah* of massive gold.[7]

On the haodah, reclining carelessly among the velvet cushions, was a young man, sheltered from the sun by a heavy brocade umbrella, which a slave held over his head. From his turban, with its thick gold fringe, a spectator acquainted with Indian etiquette would have recognized this man as a prince of the royal family; whilst the triple silken cord hanging on his breast indicated that the prince belonged to the sacred caste of Brahmins.

This young man was, in fact, none other than the high and mighty Doundou Pant Rao, heir-presumptive to the empire of the Maharattas, and last Peichva or high priest. But of all these titles none now remained to him except that of Lord of Bihtoor, a small appanage on the banks of the Ganges, the sole compensation that the English had made him for the immense empire they had wrested from his father.

Notwithstanding this spoliation the prince passed as a

[7] The *haodah* is an immense saddle placed on the back of elephants; for the wealthy it is in fact a throne, sometimes of gold or silver, and surmounted with a pavilion; most frequently it is merely a kind of couch, which will hold five or six persons.

firm partisan of the new governors of India. He was seen courting their acquaintance, mingling in their festivities, and this very day he was on his way back from Cawnpore, where he had spent the night in the midst of brilliant English society, gathered together by General Wheeler, the Commander of the Cawnpore garrison.

The soirée must have been charming, to judge from the merry laughter occasioned by the accounts the prince was giving his companions.

Doundou, with animated countenance and flashing eyes, was describing the splendour of the drawing-rooms of his European hosts, the magnificence of their toilet, and the amiability of their manners; at the same time his enthusiasm, too often approaching irony, seemed to try to excite covetousness rather than admiration.

Suddenly a deep groan was heard amidst the laughter of the merry band. All were silent at a gesture from the prince, who, quickly raising himself, perceived the beggar crouching by the roadside, and holding out beseeching hands to him.

"Who is that man?" cried Doundou, in a ringing voice.

"Oh! my lord, it is Mali," said the old man, "Mali, the serpent-charmer, who bows before your Highness, imploring pity."

"And what art thou doing here on the roadside? Why hast thou quitted thy sorcerer's den so early?" impetuously demanded the prince.

"My lord, be it as you will, but I am no sorcerer. It is

from mighty Siva, from the dread Mahadeo, that I hold my mysterious power over creeping reptiles. Last month I went to the fair at Holi, which is held, as you know, every five years in the plain of Kajraha; I went there according to venerable custom to make my serpents dance before red Kali, but the zeal of the faithful grows colder every day; the offerings were small, and after a long and fruitless journey, I hoped to reach my poor hovel this very day, when, this morning at daybreak, in attempting to cross the *nullah*, I was surprised by a crocodile. Thanks to invincible Siva, I saved my life, but my leg was crushed, and I cannot move. Have pity, Bahadour, come to my aid, and order your men to carry me to that house just near here. I am sure the generous Sahibs will willingly give me food, and allow me to rest awhile."

"Indeed!" remarked the prince, in a sarcastic tone; "thou art a fine talker, Mali. I was not aware till now thou hadst that accomplishment; thou must have picked it up during thy sojourn in the towns of the generous Sahibs. I no more doubt their generosity than thou dost, but in order that thou mayest make one more experiment, thou wilt not be sorry to be left here. I should be afraid thou wouldst have to share with me the gratitude due to them alone. Adieu, father!"

And with an imperious gesture to his driver, Doundou leaned majestically back on his throne. The fifes and cymbals again resounded, and the procession, continuing its way, soon disappeared in a wave of golden dust.

As though urged by despair, the poor charmer stood

straight up, brandished his staff for a moment, and took a few steps forward; but overcome with pain, he fell down unconscious across the road.

"The young people were galloping across the country."

CHAPTER II.

THE BOURQUIEN FAMILY.

THE old charmer was not wrong in relying in his distress upon the generosity of the proprietor of the house, which fate had a second time prevented him from reaching.

There indeed lived a Sahib or European lord, as renowned in all the country for his immense fortune as for his inexhaustible charity, M. Bourquien, one of the largest landowners of the lower Doab. His estates extended along the right bank of the Ganges, and covered a superficial area of more than twenty thousand acres, and his dependents, who numbered some thousands, peopled about thirty

villages. Besides this, M. Bourquien was no stranger in the country where he lived, as are the greater part of Europeans, who only come to India to amass large fortunes as rapidly as possible, and then return to their own countries. These temporary masters cultivate the country with avidity and overwork the natives, by whom they are hated.

To the natives M. Bourquien was more Hindoo than European; they called him *Bour-khan*, a simple phonetic adaptation of his French name, but which no one ever pronounced without ironical emphasis, for *Bour-kahn* signifies in Hindoo the "wicked master," and our planter was adored by his people.

Born in India, he could also boast of bearing the name of a true hero, a name which all patriotic Hindoos venerate to this day, that of General Hector Bourquien, the defender of Aligarh.

This General Bourquien, a Parisian, was one of that brilliant band of French adventurers who towards the close of the last century, seeing France abandon the splendid Indian empire conquered by Dupleix, enlisted in the service of the Hindoo princes, to carry on the struggle with the English.

Who among us does not know the names of Perron, De Boigne, Fantôme, Sombre, Bourquien, and of many other valiant officers, who for a moment arrested the British success, and who at least saved the honour of France in the eyes of the Indian people? These French officers transformed the Maharatta army and created those terrible

phalanxes, which in twenty battles drove back the English battalions.

The struggle lasted fifteen years, when the defection of Perron proved a fatal blow to the Maharatta cause. General Perron, a simple sergeant in the French army, had attained to a degree of power which made him almost equal with his master. Commander-in-chief of the armies of Scindia, he was, in fact, the real sovereign of Hindostan. English history represents him to us as a haughty, pusillanimous parvenu, but it is allowable to reject this unjust estimate, and to say that Perron's only fault was that he allowed himself to be guided by one absorbing motive, self-interest. Had he better understood his part, he might, with the help of the Sikhs of the Punjaub, have completely arrested the British invasion, and opened India to France. The capture of Aligarh, which General Bourquien surrendered to Lord Lake after a prolonged siege, alarmed Perron, who accepted the overtures of Wellington, and, quitting the Maharatta service, retired to Chandernagore with a considerable fortune. This defection was the ruin of that brilliant French party who had inspired England with so much alarm. Bourquien endeavoured to continue the struggle ; but defeated under the walls of Delhi, he was obliged to beat a retreat. At last, on the 27th October, 1803, the battle of Lasvâri, lost in spite of marvellous feats of valour on the part of the French officers, was a fatal blow to Scindia, who was forced to sue for peace ; the most important condition of the treaty being that this prince should banish all Frenchmen from his army.

During his stay in India, Hector Bourquien had married a young princess of the royal family of Holka, who had brought him as dowry the magnificent estate of Gandapoor, situated on the banks of the Ganges between Cawnpore and Bihtoor. After the defeat at Lasvâri, the general obtained permission from the English Government to retire here with his wife and son. The latter after a few years succeeded his father, married the daughter of a rich Brahmin of Benares, and settled permanently at Gandapoor, where he founded an indigo factory, which rapidly attained great prosperity, and which he bequeathed to his only son Armand.

M. Armand Bourquien, heir to an immense fortune, related through his grandmother and mother to the two highest castes of India, might have considered himself more Hindoo than European ; but he had never forgotten the land of his ancestors. As soon as he was at liberty to act for himself, he went to France, was married at Paris,—his grandfather's native city,—and did not return to his adopted country until after an absence of two years. When his son André was twelve years old, he was sent to Paris to finish his education. But after André's departure, great trouble fell upon M. Bourquien. In two years he lost his venerated mother and his beloved wife, who left him with a daughter scarcely fourteen years old,—Bertha, a charming child, whom the natives called the Déva of Gandapoor.

Solitude seemed insupportable to the planter, and he decided to send for his son to return at once. Having dis-

embarked at Calcutta the 15th January, 1857, André had travelled the nine hundred miles which separated him from Gandapoor in twenty days, and reached home the evening previous to the time at which our story opens.

Never was prince returning to his dominions more cheered nor more fêted by his subjects than was the young jaghirdar, Andhra-Sahib—as the Indians called him—by his father's vassals. People had come from all parts of the district to welcome him, and followed by a procession of several thousand men, and mounted on the finest elephant of the *keddah*, he made his triumphal entry into the factory.

André was then a tall, handsome youth of fifteen. His bronzed face, aquiline features, and splendid blue eyes, seemed to unite all the beauty of both types, Hindoo and French, which at first sight appear to us so distinct, and nevertheless are but two of the purest and most elevated branches of the same tree—of the same race. At Paris his companions had nicknamed him Rajah; but though he had somewhat the haughty bearing of an Indian noble, he was none the less a frank, unselfish, good-hearted lad, and had left France regretted by all who knew him.

As for André, Paris had greatly astonished him; but it was rather surprise than enthusiasm. Accustomed to wander at his own free will over his father's immense estates,—an indefatigable hunter, already well inured, notwithstanding his youth, to encounters with the terrible inhabitants of the jungle,—André felt himself cramped in France, where

hedges, walls, and barriers checked him at every step. As for the college, it was like prison to him.

His mother had said to him on leaving him at Calcutta,—

"Remember, my handsome André, you are but a savage now, and to be worthy of the name you bear, you must become a civilized man. You must work and study well, for it is by moral superiority alone we deserve to command those around us."

"I will work, dear mother," was his simple reply.

And he worked as he had promised, courageously putting up with his prison, remembering his mother's words. Nevertheless, he had joyously hailed his father's order to return, and since he had set foot again on Indian soil, his enthusiasm was inexhaustible.

The day following his return, burning with impatience to see once again the places which filled his mind with pleasant and now far-off memories, he rose before daybreak, and ran to the stable to saddle his horse Jaldi. Whilst he was doing this as noiselessly as possible, in order not to awaken any one in the house, he heard a hurried step outside, and soon his sister's lovely face appeared at the door.

"Oh! you naughty boy!" cried the young girl, whilst he tenderly kissed her. "What do you mean by running off in search of adventure directly you get home, and leaving your old playfellow behind?"

"Not so, little sister. I scarcely closed my eyes all night. I was burning with impatience, and directly day broke I could stay indoors no longer, so I came out to get

my horse and have a good canter, thinking to be back again before you were up."

"Idle excuses, sir; and as a punishment I condemn you to saddle my little mare Nila, and escort me wherever I think best to go."

"I accept the punishment most willingly, and hasten to do your command;" and having kissed Bertha again, André quickly saddled both horses.

A few minutes later the young people were galloping across the country. The sun, already just above the horizon, gilded the fan-shaped summits of the taras-palms, leaving in shadow, enveloped in bluish vapours, the luxuriant vegetation which concealed the ground. The vast, even plain stretched as far as the eye could reach, covered with splendid crops. Here were fields of barley, waving above the horses' heads; or fine indigo-plants, with golden plumes; farther off extended, like flower-beds, long rows of those many-coloured poppies from which the loathsome opium is extracted; then came fields of sugar-cane, and corn-fields, intersected here and there by groves of fig-trees, guavas, and oranges. In a word, the soil groaned beneath the weight of its wealth.

André greeted each new sight with enthusiastic cries, which astonished his sister.

"But little sister," said he to her, "how is it you can expect me not to go into raptures over this glorious land, or shout for joy when I see its splendours? It all seems so natural and simple to you because you have never seen anything else."

"But our France must be a beautiful country," replied the young girl, with a sigh.

"Certainly, my dear Bertha, France is a fine country, undoubtedly the richest in Europe, and if India were cultivated as it is, it would support a thousand millions of human beings instead of the two hundred millions of its present population. But how can France be compared to this country, where everything is grand and gigantic? The Alps might be hidden in a nook of our Himalaya, and it would take the Seine and the Garonne, with the Loire and the Rhine added, to equal our Ganges. Whilst the sun continually fertilizes our soil, and vegetation is ever new, yonder the sky is always covered with dark clouds, through which from time to time the pale sunbeams glimmer. During the summer, rainy days are not infrequent, but as soon as winter comes life seems to be suspended. The dim sunlight shows itself for a few hours from time to time; the trees are stripped of their leaves, no more fruit, no more flowers, and soon the earth is covered with a white mantle of snow, the frozen rivers seem to stop their currents of their own accord, and the people shut themselves up indoors, or only come out covered with thick clothes, which hardly protect them from colds and all kinds of horrid illness!"

"Oh! you make me shiver," cried Bertha.

"It is true that the luxuries of refined civilization soften the hardships of that climate," continued André; "and the French, far from considering themselves unfortunate, as one might think, congratulate themselves, and with some reason, on inhabiting such a country. More nume-

rous wants have made them laborious and ingenious. Whilst here the native contents himself with girding his loins with a strip of cloth, and protects his head with a light turban, a little fruit suffices him for food, and a roof of foliage shelters him,—yonder, man has need of warm clothing, strengthening food, and a house where he may spend the greater part of his life. No one can be idle in France, the struggle for life is going on perpetually, and from this struggle springs the highest degree of civilization in the world. But I am philosophizing like a professor, instead of simply admiring all around me, without envying or pitying those who want neither pity nor envy."

Just then this fine speech was interrupted by the sound of fifes and cymbals, and the young people perceived the *cortége* of the prince of Bihtoor at no great distance from them.

"Who are all those fine folks?" asked André of his sister.

"It is our neighbour Doundou Pant, who is undoubtedly returning from Cawnpore," replied Bertha.

"Doundou at Cawnpore!" exclaimed the young man, with surprise.

"Yes, Doundou at Cawnpore," repeated Bertha. "I can understand your astonishment; it is true that formerly the prince avoided all European society, only very rarely paying our father a neighbourly visit, but all that has been quite changed for some time. Probably you are not aware that General Wheeler took the command of the garrison at Cawnpore soon after you left home. He is a

The elephant, carrying the Prince, stopped before the young people.

Page 21.

most affable man, a perfect gentleman, and has quickly made himself popular with every one. Since his arrival the shy Doundou is quite altered. Putting aside all stiff reserve, he has been to see the General, and has almost atoned for his past conduct ; now no one is more punctual in being present at all fêtes given by the brilliant European society at Cawnpore. But here he is."

In fact the procession, hidden for a moment behind a thick clump of palms, came out at a few yards from them. Above the noise of cymbal and fife rose a tumult of laughter and voices. At the sight of André and Bertha holding their horses on one side the road, all were suddenly silent.

A few moments later the elephant carrying the prince stopped before the young people.

"Out so early?" said Doundou to André, in a familiar tone. "I wish you welcome on your return to our blessed land, Andhra Sahib; may you follow out here the traditions of your ancestor, the friend and supporter of the Peichvas. You know your way to the palace of Bihtoor, do you not? I intend to invite all the *élite* of English society there, and I hope that you and yours will be foremost among them."

"My father will, I have no doubt, be happy to accept your kind invitation, and his children will be delighted to accompany him to your palace," simply replied André.

"Well, I hope soon to see you again then," said the prince, and bowing to the brother and sister with a gracious smile, he signed to his driver to proceed.

The sun was now high in the heavens, and Bertha reminded her brother that it was time for them to go back home, where their father would be impatiently waiting for them.

"But the Ganges, my dear Bertha!" exclaimed André. "I have not yet cast eyes on our father Ganges, as our Indians say. Only think, it is to him we owe all our wealth, and that it needs but an outburst of his anger to deprive us of everything. I cannot defer my visit, and I should be truly afraid of offending the all-powerful son of Siva. Come along; a good gallop and we are there,—unless," said he merrily, "the fair Bertha is afraid of the burning rays of fair Phœbus."

But the young girl had already spurred her horse, and the two riders were soon far away. The magnificent river lay before them, majestically rolling its broad expanse of blue water in the sunlight, when Jaldi, André's horse, shied so suddenly that the young man, notwithstanding his firm seat, was almost thrown from his saddle. He was steadying himself on his steed and patting it soothingly when, turning round, he saw his sister holding in her horse with a look of fear.

"What is the matter, little sister," cried he; "have you become frightened as well? Jaldi has undoubtedly forgotten me, but I will soon teach him that I am not going to be thrown quite so easily as he thinks."

"But look, look, brother!" gasped the young girl, pointing before her and turning away her eyes with horror.

André then perceived the body of a man lying across

the road almost under Jaldi's feet. In an instant he had sprung to the ground, and throwing his bridle to Bertha, he went up to the poor man. Raising him with difficulty, he dragged him to the side of the road, and placed him gently on the bank. He was soon certain that the man was alive, although his clothes were stained with blood, which flowed from a large wound in his leg.

Leaving the wounded man in charge of his sister, who, now reassured, had dismounted and come to her brother's assistance, André ran to the river; and having dipped his handkerchief in the water, he bound it round the poor man's brow. It had an almost instantaneous effect; the old charmer heaved a sigh, opened his eyes, and looked wonderingly at the two young people.

"Ah! the Sahibs," said he.

"Yes, my poor man, we are Sahibs," said André; "but we wish you no harm. What has happened to you to bring you into this state?"

"I was seized by a crocodile at break of day in trying to cross the *nullah*," replied Mali; "and I have no strength left to continue my journey."

"But if the accident happened to you at daybreak," said Bertha, "how is it that no passer-by has helped you?"

"Prince Doundou went by here, but he only laughed at my misfortune," replied the old man.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Bertha. "Well, we will not follow his example. We are going to take you to our house, and I am sure my father will not refuse to welcome you."

"You are very kind, dear young lady," replied Mali; "but I am so weak, it would be impossible for me to reach your father's bungalow. Leave me here, but I pray you send me a little food by one of your servants. After a day's rest I shall be able to go on my way, and I hope to get back to my hut to-morrow."

"I will not hear of that, my good man," said André. "The heat of the sun might inflame your wound; and, in any case, you could not walk in this state. I am going to help you to get on my horse, and then we shall be able to reach the factory."

"Ride on your horse! You cannot surely think of such a thing, my lord!" cried Mali. "You do not know that I am but a beggar—a simple *Nât*."

"Beggar or *Nât*, you are going to mount my horse," repeated André. "I will have it so."

André's decided tone seemed to convince the old man; and again stammering some excuse, he raised himself with a groan, and, assisted by the brother and sister, mounted Jaldi. André took Jaldi's bridle, Bertha followed on horseback, and thus the little band set out on their way home.

It was certainly a touching spectacle to see this miserable beggar thus escorted, but to one acquainted with the customs of India, and knowing what a great gulf separates the different castes of this country, it was a most impressive sight; for they who were thus caring for the old charmer—the representative of a despised race—were the Sahibs, that is to say, lords, the all-powerful masters of the country.

Thus, great was the surprise of the numerous servants when they saw this singular procession enter the courtyard of the factory. The young people had not misjudged their father's hospitality, by whose order old Mali was soon comfortably installed in one of the farm cottages, and surrounded by all the care his case required.

"Old Mali was looking affectionately at a beautiful black cobra."

CHAPTER III.

THE QUEEN OF SERPENTS.

THE following morning André and Bertha eagerly went to inquire after their poor *protégé*. As they were leaving the bungalow they met the *hâkim* or native doctor, who had been hastily sent for on the previous day to attend to the wounded man. The doctor had nothing but good news to give them. The crocodile's horrible bite had simply torn the flesh without damaging the bones. The wound itself, although large, was not serious; the dressing seemed to have produced an excellent effect already. In short,

Mali would be quite well again after a few days' compulsory rest.

Delighted with this news, André and Bertha thanked the doctor, and went towards the cabin where the sick man lay. As they drew near they thought they could distinguish the old man's voice addressing some stranger. André signed to his sister to listen, and they both stood still near the half-opened door.

"So there thou art, my beautiful queen, my faithful companion," the old man was saying. "Whilst the other ungrateful creatures abandoned me in a moment of peril and fled like cowards, thou alone wished to share my misfortune. But now, henceforth, all the caresses and luxuries are for thee. When I go to Benares, I will bring back a fine muslin to decorate thy bed, which thou shalt have all to thyself, and I will ornament my toumril with pieces of coral to charm thine eyes, which are like those of the divine Parbati. And when I have found the fugitives again, for they cannot escape me, I will make them crawl before thee on fête-days like slaves."

Who could this mysterious stranger be to whom the old man was speaking so endearingly? The brother and sister quietly crossed the threshold, and cast a timid glance round the room.

Great was their surprise at the sight before them. Half-reclining on a mat which, according to the custom of the country, served him as a bed, old Mali, whilst he spoke, was looking affectionately at a beautiful black cobra, the most formidable of Indian serpents, which was coiled round

on the ground near him. The reptile, with upraised head and puffed-out hood, was swaying itself backwards and forwards, as though rocked by the sweet music of the old man's praises.

Bertha could not stifle a scream of terror at this sight. Frightened by the noise, the serpent uncoiled itself and disappeared, hissing, beneath the mat. The listeners finding themselves discovered entered the cabin.

"Ah! it is you, my good protectors," said Mali; "be welcome, and may blue Vichnu grant you a place in Mérou, in reward for all your kindness. Excuse your humble servant if he does not rise to greet you."

As they seemed to hesitate to go nearer him, he added,—

"Do not be alarmed, my kind master and mistress, the good Sâprani knows how to recognize my friends, and she will do you no harm. Our late adventures have made her rather timid, otherwise she would not have stirred when you came in."

"Was it that nasty serpent, then, that you were talking to?" asked Bertha. "I warn you I have a horror of serpents, and papa has given orders that every one found near our house is to be killed."

"There are serpents, and serpents," replied Mali; "and I am sure your father is too kind ever to order any harm to be done to my poor friend. And you yourself, mademoiselle, when you know my dear Sâprani, I am certain that you will like her."

"I am afraid you are mistaken there, my good man," said André. "My sister is a great coward, and I believe that all the arguments in the world would not make her like a serpent. As for my father, I am quite sure he will protect this one you seem to take so much interest in."

Bertha made a little grimace on hearing her brother criticize her courage, but she attempted no protest.

"How do you feel this morning?" André asked the old man. "The doctor has given us a very favourable account of you, and he says you will soon be able to walk about again."

"I still feel very weak," replied Mali; "and if you will grant me a few days' hospitality—"

"Most certainly," interrupted the young man; "it is my father's wish that you should stay as long as you like."

"Thank you, my good sir; but I would ask leave to continue my journey after a day or two. I lost all my serpents except Sâprani at the time of my accident, and I must not delay searching for them. I know they will not be far from the place where I fell, so I expect I shall soon find them."

"What can you want with those horrid creatures?" exclaimed Bertha, with a shudder.

"These horrid creatures, mademoiselle, are my only means of gaining a livelihood. I have trained them to obey me, and I take them about from town to town to exhibit their skill and intelligence. As soon as I have a

crowd round me, I place my baskets on the ground, and taking my toumril I play a melodious air. My cobras immediately begin to move; one by one they come out of their baskets and place themselves at my feet; then, following the modulations of the tune, they raise themselves, puff out their hoods, and dance, keeping time to the music; finally they coil themselves one by one round my body, and form an aureole of hissing heads over my forehead, which makes me look like the terrible Siva himself. Then coins are showered round me, and I am thus able to buy a little rice and milk, enough for myself and reptiles. From Patna to Hardvar, from the Himalaya to the sacred river Nerbudda, every one knows the great charmer Mali. There is not a festival that I am not invited to, for no one can make serpents dance before the altar of red Kali better than myself. My secrets for curing venomous bites and warding off evil spells are renowned. In fact, every one holds me in awe, and though I have never done harm to any one, yet I am despised by all."

"Why do they despise you, my good Mali?" asked André, who seemed to be much interested. "I should have thought that being a beggar you would have been entitled to respect from the Hindoos, who venerate those who disdain the pomps of this world."

"They despise me because I am the faithful priest of a worship which is dying out. Formerly the whole universe inclined before our altars, and the god-serpent clasped the world in its folds. Our venerable mysteries were not only respected on the sacred peninsula of Djambou-dvîp, they

reigned supreme in the frozen lands from whence came your ancestors."

"Yes," interrupted Bertha; "but according to God's promise, a virgin came who crushed the serpent's head beneath her heel."

"The serpent," continued André with fervour, "might have seemed a suitable god for the first human beings, who, despising their Creator, bowed themselves in fear and trembling before the creature. True, this dread god well personified terror, cunning, and malice, and he has disappeared in darkness before our God, who is light and love and goodness. My poor Mali, be content with making your serpents dance in the public streets, and do not try to raise their altars, which are for ever destroyed." Then seeing the old priest's brow darken, he added, in a calmer voice, "But you promised just now to speak about your favourite cobra. Well, now tell us its story; it cannot fail to be interesting."

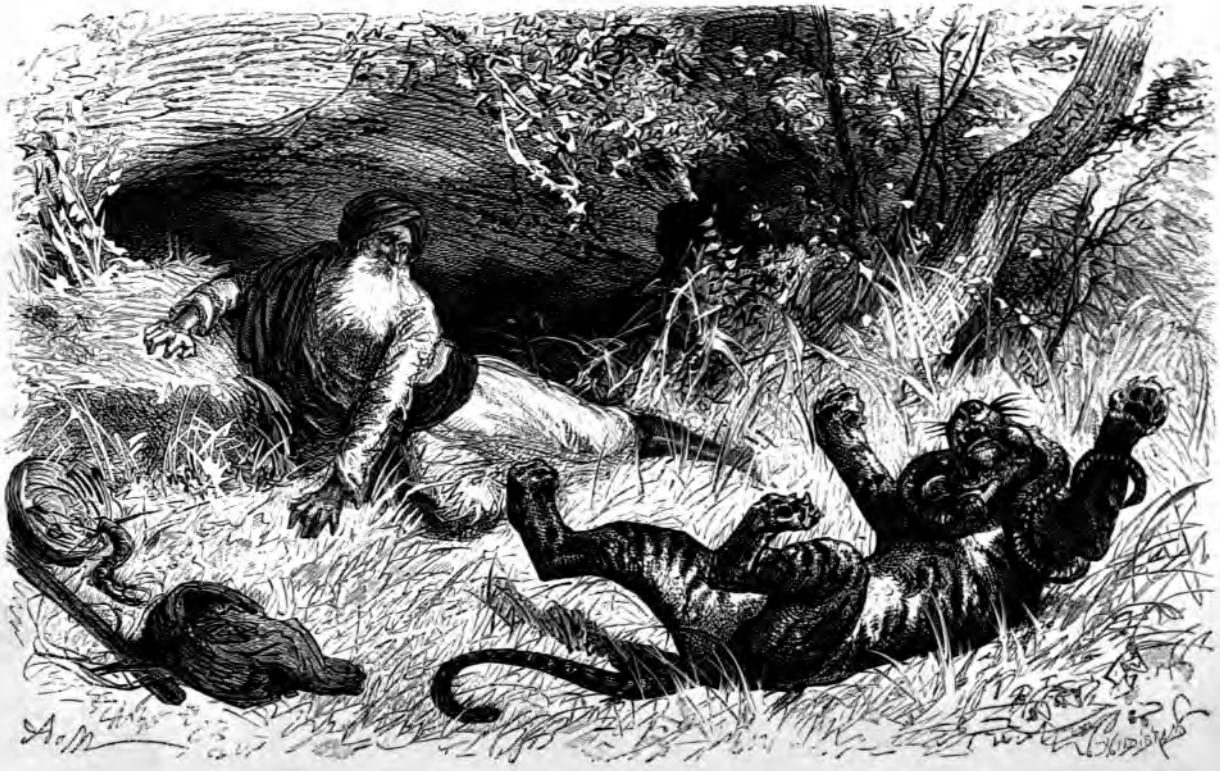
These words seemed to restore the old man's serenity, and he began his story without further pressing. Bertha placed herself prudently near the door, whilst André sat on the mat beside the charmer.

"Two years ago," said Mali, "I was going with my serpents to the fair at Bhilsa. As you undoubtedly know, this town has been celebrated for more than twenty centuries for the wonderful monuments with which it is surrounded, and also for its position at the outlet of the sacred river Betva, which issues from the dark Vindhyas at this spot. The surrounding country is one of the wildest tracts

of land on the face of the earth. Dense forests cover the mountains, which have no other inhabitants than the Goundnu and the cruel Bhîl. I had nothing to dread from these savages, who venerate me as a demi-god, and tremble with fear at sight of me; but I had every day to confront dangers none the less terrible—that of meeting with some of the numerous wild beasts which haunt these wilds. Thus I was obliged to make my way with precaution, only travelling by day in the heat of the noonday sun, at which time, as you know, wild beasts never leave their dens.

"However, I arrived safely at a halting-place for Bhilsa, where I learnt that the forest through which I had yet to pass was inhabited by a tiger man-eater, which in the last week had devoured two imprudent travellers. The villagers advised me to change my route; but in order to do that I should have been obliged to skirt the mountain, which would have taken me three days longer. Besides this, the fair opened on the following day; in this case I should have arrived too late for the great ceremony, the purification of the idol, which takes place on the first day, and which never fails to bring me a good sum.

"This thought decided me, and notwithstanding the entreaties of the country people, I bravely set out for the forest. My courage sank in proportion as I penetrated further into the jungle; but I kept on walking, calling upon the name of the intrepid brothers Pandous. My baskets were very heavy, and impeded my progress. I had a few days previously collected a number of young cobras, still



only half tamed, which, added to my old pupils, considerably increased my burden.

"I had been walking for two hours, and was already congratulating myself on my boldness, and so much the more as I thought I could see the outskirts of the forest, when all at once, on turning the corner of a projecting rock, I found myself face to face with the man-eater,—a magnificent tiger, as big as a buffalo,—which was standing motionless in the centre of the path.

"Seized with fright, I let my baskets fall, which opened and allowed the serpents to escape. I scarcely noticed this fact at the time, and I stood as though petrified, with my eyes fixed on my terrible enemy. He advanced towards me, but I thought neither of flight nor resistance. At a few steps from me he gave a loud roar, and with a bound threw me to the ground. I closed my eyes, and felt stifled beneath the weight of the enormous beast, who was crouching over me with his sharp claws fastened in my chest and legs. However, the monster did not quite kill me, and I was wondering what could have persuaded him thus to prolong my miserable existence, when, to my great surprise, I felt myself free. I opened my eyes; the tiger was rolling on the ground, a few steps from me, as though in a paroxysm of rage. I remained motionless, expecting the tiger would return and devour me; but the monstrous creature did not seem inclined to do me any more harm. For a quarter of an hour he writhed in horrible convulsions, then I saw him fall and lie motionless.

"For a few minutes, perhaps for longer, I lay still on the

ground. At last, as nothing stirred, I got up and cautiously approached: the tiger was dead. I fell on my knees to thank Rama for his signal protection, then, having collected my serpents, who had hidden themselves under the brushwood, I put them back in my baskets, and was about to hasten from this fatal spot, when I perceived that one of my young cobras, already the most intelligent and affectionate, was missing. I had searched everywhere in vain, when I thought of looking at the tiger again, and what did I then see? Sâprani, my young cobra, was coiled round the wild beast's neck, its venomous fangs deeply planted in the monster's throat. I understood all then,—the man-eater's flight, its convulsions, its death. Sâprani had saved my life!

"When I reached Bhilsa, great were the acclamations of the crowd on learning of the miraculous event. Every one wanted to see the Queen of Serpents: the high priest entertained me in its honour during all my stay; and I left Bhilsa laden with gold and presents. And now, do you still think, mademoiselle, that I ought not to prize this good, devoted creature? And see, did not she alone follow me yesterday through all my misfortunes?"

"Yes, you are right," replied Bertha. "I see Sâprani is a good, faithful creature, and from to-day I shall have a bowl of milk brought for her as a reward."

"Oh! you may be sure she will thank you heartily for it," said Mali.

At that moment, as though the intelligent creature understood all that was going on, they saw its head appear at the

edge of the mat, then, growing bolder, it drew its whole body out and coiled itself round on the floor.

This was too much for Bertha's courage, and, hiding her eyes, she quickly made her escape, and ran back to the bungalow.

André, not so easily frightened, wished to examine the singular Sâprani more closely, which she allowed him to do with a very good grace.

It was a magnificent cobra, two yards long. Its round, flexible body was covered with black scales, intermingled with evenly marked yellow spots. But what most astonished the young man was, when, at a sign from its master, the creature spread out the membrane in which its head was encased, and showed the two black circles with which it was adorned, and which has gained for its species the name of spectacled serpents.

"Then has this feeble creature the strength to kill a tiger in a few moments?" asked he of the charmer.

"The tiger bitten by a cobra," replied Mali, "dies in less than a quarter of an hour."

"And a man?" continued André.

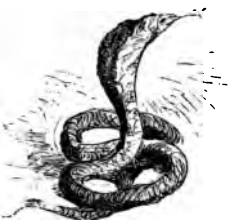
"For a man it is different; a few minutes are enough."

"A few minutes!" exclaimed the young man.

"The learned doctors of Calcutta," continued the Hindoo, "affirm that the effect of the cobra's sting operates on a man in a minute and a half."

"How frightful!" exclaimed André; "I hope your Sâprani will be kind enough never to consider me your enemy."

"As to that, you may make your mind easy, my dear Sahib," promptly replied the old man. "Henceforth Mali and Sâprani both belong to you, and are free for you to dispose of according to your pleasure."



"The palace was a spacious edifice of pink and white marble."

CHAPTER IV.

AT HOME WITH THE PRINCE OF BIHTOUR.

A FEW days later a gay cavalier, resplendent with gold lace, brought Prince Doundou's promised invitation to Gandapour.

Monsieur Bourquien, who cared little for fêtes and noisy assemblies, and lived very much apart from society since his wife's death, had at first thought of politely declining the prince's invitation; but it would have given offence to a powerful neighbour, and, above all, deprived his children of a pleasure which they seemed to look forward to with great delight.

So the messenger returned, taking with him the assurance that M. Bourquien and his children would be present at the fête which the Prince of Bihtour was about to give at his palace, to the *élite* of Cawnpore and Lucknow.

Great was the delight of André and Bertha when they learnt their father's decision.

"There is only one thing that annoys me," said the young man to his sister; "it is being obliged to put on a horrible black coat to go among all those Eastern grandees."

"And would you like to figure in your planter's dress," said Bertha, smiling, "and see me disguised like an Indian squaw with feathers in my hair?"

"No," replied André impatiently, "but I think it is ridiculous to confine oneself to inconvenient ugly European clothes, when one has the elegant Eastern costume at disposal. Do you think I should not look well in a golden turban and silken robes?"

"Oh, no!" said Bertha; "but you know the English think it improper to adopt the native dress."

"What do I care for the English!" exclaimed the young man. "It is their absurd decorum that alienates the natives from us. Instead of fraternizing with them as the first French conquerors of India did, they raise up barrier upon barrier to keep themselves apart, without reflecting that at the first approach of danger the barrier will be a source of trouble to them, rather than a protection. And why should we Franco-Indians imitate them? I know very well, if I were in my father's place, I would follow our great grandfather's example, who served France and the Peïchva."

"André," said his sister, "you are rebelling against the legal government of the country, and, what is worse still, against your father. Come, Monsieur Revolutionist, you would certainly make a fine Rajah, but at present you must content yourself with a black coat."

"You are right, little sister," replied the young man, kissing her, "and I am a great simpleton. We have not seen Mali or his incomparable companion, Sâprani, to-day."

"I can quite well do without seeing that serpent," said Bertha; "all its merits have not reconciled me to reptiles. Besides, see! there is Mali coming towards us."

The old charmer was in fact making his way to the house, supporting his tottering steps with his long, magical staff, painted a bright red ochre. The brother and sister ran to meet their good old friend.

"Well, Mali!" cried they together, "we are going to Bihtour."

"Is it not delightful?" added Bertha, clapping her hands; "they say that the fête will be partly European and partly Indian. During the day we shall see nautch dancing and jugglers; then in the evening they will dance in the English way."

"Cursed be Doundou and his fêtes!" muttered the old man.

"Come, come, Mali," said André, "I know that Prince Doundou and you are not the best of friends. He left you very cruelly in a sad condition, but he is more thoughtless and vain than wicked, and that is no reason for thus

sending him to Pluto or to the dark Daïtias, as your people say."

"He who has robbed the tigress of her cub, should fear to see her claws grow," replied Mali.

"Really, my good friend, your figures of speech are very poetical, but rather doleful," said the young man, smiling. "You look at the dark side of everything. The other morning our servants found a wheaten cake, a common *tchapati*, at the door of their cabins, which a mysterious hand had placed there during the night. As soon as you heard of this paltry joke, you at once began to prophecy most mournfully. According to you, the *tchapatis* were a sign of war and revolt. They signified: 'Let every man prepare his bread and be ready to start, for the hour is come!' Our dogs made but a mouthful of these cakes, and you see no one was foolish enough to make his bread and set out on his journey."

"Man has eyes and sees not, ears and hears not," emphatically replied the old man.

"Come now; at your proverbs again," said André impatiently. "Good-bye, Mali; we will tell you all about the fête; perhaps that will enliven you."

And taking his sister by the hand, he ran with her back to the house, leaving Mali inveighing against his enemy Doundou.

The much-wished-for fête-day arrived at last. A boat, which had been gaily decorated with French flags, was to convey the Bourquiens to the Bihtour palace, situated on the same bank of the Ganges, above Gandapour.

The trip up the river was charming. André and Bertha went into raptures over the lovely scenery, and gave vent to their feelings in exclamations of delight and gay laughter. M. Bourquien alone was grave and pensive; but his children, full of their own happiness, gave little heed to his unusual preoccupation.

On nearing Bihtour the Bourquiens' boat was joined by several others filled with guests, also going to the palace. They sailed in company, and the laughter and merriment increased. But when, at a bend of the river, the palace of Doundou suddenly broke upon their view, there was a chorus of admiring exclamations and enthusiastic cheers.

It would have been difficult to imagine a spectacle grander, and at the same time more poetical. The palace, a spacious edifice of pink and white marble, with its long, delicately sculptured facades, its rows of balconies, and its turrets surmounted with fairy minarets, stood majestically at the top of a magnificent flight of a thousand carved steps, which, extending to the river, dipped their base in the water. Immense silken standards waved in all directions, fancifully blending their gay colours in the wind. A motley crowd covered the terraces overhanging the river, where hundreds of gondolas, with gilded prows and flag-decked masts, were gently swaying to the motion of the water. The ardent Indian sunlight falling upon this glittering mass of gold and colours heightened the brilliancy of the scene, and enveloped it in a mist of golden glory.

When the little flotilla of boats reached the flight of marble steps, loud cheering rose from the crowd, and

a flourish of trumpets awakened the echoes in the gardens.

Prince Doundou, in person, transgressing the strict Hindoo etiquette, stood on the bank to receive each guest with a few words of welcome. On seeing M. Bourquien his face lit up, and he came eagerly forward to meet him.

"Ah, noble Sirdar!" exclaimed he (the title of *Sirdar*, which is equivalent to our title of Duke, had been conferred on the Bourquiens by the Maharatta kings), "notwithstanding your promise, I scarcely hoped to have the pleasure of welcoming you and your charming children. How delighted I am that you decided to come! Our fête would have been incomplete, had not the palace of the sons of the Peïchvas been honoured with the presence of the son of their most faithful supporter."

"Those times are long past," replied M. Bourquien; "there are now no Peïchvas, and I am but a humble planter, a tiller of the ground."

Without further remark, Doundou took the European by the arm, and together they ascended the steps leading up to the palace. André and Bertha followed them, and continued their admiring inspection without restraint.

"Just look, André!" said the young girl; "these are shawls—real Cashmere shawls—on which we are treading."

"Yes, little sister," replied her brother; "it seems that this is always the custom among wealthy Hindoos. The shawl has never been an article of clothing for them, but a sumptuous carpet, which they take about with them to

place on the cold marble floors when they sit down. But look how magnificently all those nobles are dressed. Here is one covered with steel and gold, whom you might take for a paladin, whilst his neighbour, with his damask doublet and wide breeches, looks like a minion of the court of Henry III."

"What a pity we cannot see the princesses!" continued Bertha: "I am sure they must look magnificent with their gold and diamonds."

"Ah, well!" said the young man, laughing, "His Excellence Doundou Pant Rao does not carry civilization so far as to allow the ladies of his Court to be exposed to our profane gaze; but it is very likely you may be more fortunate, and will be allowed to enter the harem."

Thus talking they reached the palace, where the objects of wonderment increased to such a degree, that André and Bertha were at a loss how to express their admiration.

Scarcely had the guests crossed the vestibule,—where stood a double row of servants, with fans of peacock feathers, and fly-flaps of yak silk,—when they found themselves in a lovely garden. The walks, paved with pink marble, wound beneath thick arches of odoriferous trees; brooks babbled through canals inlaid with mosaics representing flowers and fish, and were reunited in basins where the water leapt from a thousand jets.

At the end of the garden rose an elegant pavilion, supported by a hundred columns of Oriental alabaster, where a collation of fruit and Indian drinks was served. As soon as the guests were seated round the table, the reservoirs

above the pavilion let their contents overflow, and falling in showers over the four sides of the light edifice, enveloped it with a liquid wall, gleaming with a thousand rainbows.

After the collation, the Europeans went over the palace itself. They visited the vast state-rooms, where the walls, covered with golden arabesques surrounding numerous minute mirrors, seemed to flash with a thousand fire-lights; then they passed through miniature galleries, and rooms for siestas, the marble floors of which had no other ornament than light mosaics of precious stones.

At last all were gathered in one room where the amusements were to take place. When every one was seated on the divans round the room, servants brought the ladies ewers of rose-water, and the gentlemen lighted hookahs filled with a perfumed mixture.

Like all Indian fêtes, this one began with a nautch. The nautch, or bayadere dance, is not what we understand by a dance. It is an almost serious ceremony, of a semi-religious character. Enveloped in long silken veils, the bayaderes revolve slowly and gracefully, accompanying their movements with a slow, monotonous chant, fifes, cymbals, and tam-tams accentuating the rhythm.

Nevertheless, to tell the truth, we must say that neither André nor Bertha were greatly impressed with the nautch. The jugglers who followed excited very little more interest. The young people paid little attention to these men, who, as agile and supple as serpents, transformed and metamorphosed themselves beneath their eyes. The famous egg dance alone seemed to awaken their slumbering enthusiasm;

it is, in fact, one of the most graceful feats executed by Indian acrobats. The dancer, a nimble, athletic young girl, carries an osier-wheel of considerable dimensions placed horizontally on the crown of her head; round this wheel threads are hung at equal distances, provided at their extremities with slip-knots kept open by means of a glass bead. Thus equipped, she advances carrying a basket filled with eggs. The musicians strike up a jerky, monotonous tune; and the dancer begins to turn round with great rapidity. Then taking an egg, she places it in one of the slip-knots, and with a dexterous movement, throws it so as to fasten it in the knot. By the effect of centrifugal force, produced by the rapid circular movement of the dancer, the thread holding the egg is extended in a straight line corresponding with the circumference. One after another the eggs are thrown into the slip-knots, and soon form an horizontal aureola round the dancer's head. At this moment the dance grows more and more rapid; the young girl's features can scarcely be distinguished; it is a critical moment; the least false step, the least loss of time, and the eggs would be broken one against the other. But how then is the dance to be interrupted? how is it to be stopped? There is but one way, which is to remove the eggs in the same manner in which they have been placed there. This is the more delicate operation of the two. With a precise, dexterous movement, the dancer must seize the egg and draw it to her; it can easily be understood that if her hand were placed awkwardly in the circle, it need touch but one of the threads to break the general harmony.

After this representation, chamberlains with gold-headed canes entered, and invited the guests to pass into the dining-hall, where dinner awaited them. Here also the *coup-d'œil* was magnificent and fairylike. The table, laid out in English style, glittered with silver plate and finely-cut glass, in the centre of which rose veritable mountains of rare flowers. It was said that the Rao had ordered cooks especially for the occasion from Calcutta, a distance of three hundred miles, and that the fruit and confectionery came from Bombay.

The prince, according to Hindoo custom, did not sit down to table, his religion forbidding him to eat with infidels. But towards the end of the banquet he made his appearance, followed by a servant bearing a golden goblet. Taking the cup, he filled it with champagne, and, raising it to his forehead, he said in a loud voice,—

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us drink to the health of our gracious sovereign, Queen Victoria."

As though electrified by these simple words, the company rose en masse, every glass was raised, and, in a grave enthusiastic tone, each guest repeated, "The Queen! the Queen! the Queen!"

"To the health of General Wheeler and the brave army he represents," added the prince.

This toast was in its turn drunk with a triple hurrah, and a series of others followed, not less cordially received. General Wheeler proposed the health "of the amiable host and the future of young India." Each toast had its success. When it came to M. Bourquien's turn, he required

Taking the cup, he filled it with champagne.

Page 46.

some pressing; then rising, he said slowly, and looking at Doundou, "Gentlemen, to forgetfulness of the past, and to hope in the future." He was applauded but feebly, and Major Paterson, remarking in an undertone to his neighbour that decidedly French gallantry was dying out, rose and drank "To the ladies of the United Kingdom and Hindoostan." This toast was received by a quadruple salvo of cheers, and won its author hearty congratulations.

At this moment the lively sounds of an orchestra reminded the Europeans that, as Bertha had said, the fête was to be partly Indian and partly European. Every one passed into the ball-room, and soon the dancers were whirling lightly round.

M. Bourquien alone stood at the door, looking on at the gay scene with an almost melancholy air. Suddenly he felt a hand placed on his shoulder, and a voice which he recognized as the prince's, said to him familiarly,—

"How now, Sirdar Bour Khan, why keep so far away from the festivities?"

"These gaieties are scarcely suited to my age, prince," said he, "and besides, the hour itself is ill-fitted for amusement."

"What do you mean, Sahib?" asked Doundou quickly.

"Ah! you know undoubtedly as well as I do, perhaps better," replied M. Bourquien. "Whilst we are dancing here, I know not what fatal cloud seems to hover over old India. The air is heavily charged with electricity, and it seems to me the storm may break forth any moment; each day some ominous prognostic warns me of the immi-

nence of the peril, and I am uneasy at the blindness of those who govern us."

"Come, Sahib," said the prince, "you give yourself unnecessary anxiety. What are these terrible prognostics which seem to alarm you? Could it be that famous distribution of *tchapatis* which made us laugh so much the other day at the Governor's house? Believe me, the English rule is henceforth firmly established, and nothing can shake it. Can it not even rely upon the support of the chiefs of the Indian nation? Have not I, even I, son of the Peichvas, bowed before the English rule? Have I not enhanced my reconciliation by all the *éclat* possible? Did I not the other day swear fidelity to the Queen, and to make my oath indelible, did I not, whilst swearing, place my hand upon the head of the Sacred Cow? No, no; reassure yourself, and let these young people dance without a shadow on their happiness."

M. Bourquien did not seem convinced, and shaking his head half sadly, he resumed,—

"I believe your word and your fidelity, Doundou, but that is not enough to dissipate my fears. Laugh, if you will, at the mysterious *tchapatis*,—a clear sign to one who can see; but I have other news, more alarming, more real, more terrible, and I wonder greatly to see General Wheeler so calm."

"What news?" said the prince slowly.

"I have just received a letter from one of my friends at Allahabad, which informs me that the Bengalee Fusileers of Serampoor revolted last month, and murdered their officers."

"That is old news," interrupted Doundou, "and all is now quiet again."

"True; but since then, the Sepoys have revolted at Patna and Agra; and, if I am to believe my friend's letter, the Sepoys of Meerut are marching against Delhi."

"Well, then, it is a general insurrection," exclaimed the prince with animation. "What can the handful of Europeans do against these battalions?"

"They will struggle," gravely replied M. Bourquien; "and each one will know how to do his duty, and perish, if needs be, in defence of the cause of civilization."

"You do not mean to say that you yourself would take up arms?" interrupted Doundou. "Respected and beloved by all, you know that you have nothing to fear, and that the triumph of the Hindoos will make your fortune Did not your grandfather a hundred times successfully contend against the English?"

"My grandfather fought like a brave soldier, face to face with the enemy, but no more than myself would he have agreed to serve or command a band of lawless rebels, who begin their claim for pretended rights by pillage and murder."

"You are a noble fellow!" exclaimed the prince, "and if the English have many allies like you they have nothing to fear. But once again, I assure you your anxiety is ungrounded. We shall dance many times yet at Bihtour before your lugubrious prophecies are fulfilled;" and with these words he shook hands with the Frenchman, who, deep in thought, sought the shade and quiet of the garden.

The ball was carried on far into the night. When at last the guests re-embarked they were escorted down the river by brilliantly-lighted boats carrying musicians.

When André and Bertha fell asleep that night their young heads were so full of light and splendour, that little wonder it seemed to them all a dream.

"Approaching M. Bourquien, he saluted him with a ceremonious bow."

CHAPTER V.

VENGEANCE AND PEICHVA!

THE following morning, M. Bourquien, leaving his children to rest after their long day of excitement, went out very early to inspect some crops of indigo which were being harvested.

Scarcely had he crossed the factory courtyard when he found himself confronted by old Mali. The charmer seemed prepared for a journey; his serpent baskets, constituting all his belongings, were placed on the ground beside him.

"Well, Mali," said M. Bourquien with astonishment, "where are you off to so early?"

"I am going to leave you, my lord," replied the old man. "When I have found my serpents I shall cross the Ganges, and then I am only a few hours' walk from my home."

"And is this the way you leave us," continued the planter, "without ever saying good-bye to me or your two young protectors?"

"Not so, my dear master," said Mali; "I quite intended to prostrate myself before you and your children before I left, but I wanted to see you alone, and it was for that reason I waited here for you."

"What do you want of me then?" asked M. Bourquien; "surely your two good advocates have convinced you that I shall still grant you any favour you may ask. Speak, what do you want?"

"Nothing, my lord; you have already overwhelmed me with kindness," replied the old man, "and nothing you could give would make Mali more your faithful servant than he is and ever will be. Allow me only to ask you a question. What did Nana Sahib say to you yesterday?"

"Who is Nana Sahib?"

"Pardon me," replied the old man, "I should have said Prince Doundou, as you call him. When Doundou was son and heir-presumptive to the last Peichva, they called him Nana Sahib, because that was the title he must take on coming to the throne. Hence the habit which old men like myself, friends of his father, have of calling him Nana Sahib."

"Very good, my friend; but the prince said nothing particular to me."

"Ah! that is strange," said Mali; then after a moment's hesitation he added, "Yet I must speak to you, though it should cost me my life. Sit down, I pray you, near me, for I am still weak, and grant me a few moment's attention."

M. Bourquien did as the charmer wished, and sat down with him by the roadside.

"When I was quite a child," began the charmer,—"that is years ago now,—my father took me with him to the Court at Poonah to make serpents dance during the solemnities of Dassara. It chanced one day that as I was alone fulfilling these sacred functions in the temple of the good goddess Parbati, the queen entered accompanied by a numerous suite. Trembling with timidity, I continued my exorcisms, and chanted one of our ancient refrains according to custom. My face pleased the princess; she inquired my age, and persuaded my father to leave me at Court, where I was to be employed in the service of the Rani.

"Thus I grew up near the Peichva. It was the time of his greatest power; his generalissimos, Holkar and Scindia, occupied two-thirds of Hindoostan in his name; his armies contended successfully against the English, who then came to his Court, not as arrogant masters, but as supplicant ambassadors. I often saw French officers at Poonah who came to direct our armies,—Perron Sahib, the Sirdar de Boigne; and among them I have more than once admired

the noble bearing of your grandfather, the famous *Bourkhan*, as they called him, the hero of heroes, the last who remained faithful to our cause.

"Ere long all was changed. One day the queen was obliged to fly from her gilded palace at Poonah. I accompanied her with a few other devoted servants, and we took refuge in a village of Bundelcund. We carried with us the young Nana,—a poor babe just opening his eyes on the world, and yet the only hope of the great Maharatta nation, the sole heir of the king of kings.

"The child grew up in exile, and I remained near him, loving him as a son, venerating him as my sovereign. Yet his was a proud, overbearing, cruel nature, and I sometimes said to myself that his heart must have been chiselled out of a block of stone. He gave me good proof of this. One day an English officer came to find us out in our retreat. He was sent by the Governor, who offered Prince Doundou an immense fortune on condition that he would abandon his legitimate title. I thought that the prince would refuse, but he accepted the offer. My patriotic heart was so horrified by this feebleness that the same evening, when walking alone with him on the banks of the Nerbudda, I reproached him with perhaps more freedom than was warranted by my age and position. Scarcely had I spoken than I drew back alarmed at the effect of my words on the prince. 'Evil be on thee,' exclaimed he, 'thou cowardly and unclean sorcerer, to have doubted me for one moment! Learn,—and I take the sacred river Nerbudda to witness,—that never will Nana forget, never will Nana forgive. Were

I obliged to degrade myself even to becoming friendly with the infamous English, I would not hesitate to take that step, would it but lead me to vengeance. I hope with all my heart—yes, and I am determined, that the blood of their wives and children shall make atonement for the tears I have shed over my humiliated and enslaved country. As for thee, begone! get from my presence, and never let me set eyes on thy ill-boding face again.'

"Nothing could appease the anger of my royal master. I once again resumed my pariah's staff and the trade of my fathers. The other day, for the first time after twenty years, I found myself once again in Doundou's presence. I implored him, but he had no pity on the suffering of his old servant. Well, Bourquien Sahib, remember that Nana has neither forgotten nor forgiven. He is adorning with flowers to-day the victims he will slay to-morrow."

At that moment the charmer was interrupted by the joyous cries of André and Bertha, who after a long search, had just caught sight of their father.

"Good morning, papa," shouted Bertha from a distance; "we have been looking for you for the last hour."

A moment later the brother and sister were being kissed by their father.

"What are you doing here in such mysterious conference with Mali?" asked André. "I hope he is not favouring you with his usual proverbs: 'He who has robbed the tigress of her cub must fear to see her claws grow.' 'Man has eyes and sees not.' Decidedly, my old friend, I like your serpent performances better than your morals."

"Are you going away then, Mali?" added the young girl, "and without wishing us good-bye; that is too bad of you."

"I am indeed going away, mademoiselle," replied the charmer; "but I was just this moment thanking your father for all his kindness, and I was waiting till you should be up to wish you good-bye."

"Why are you going?" continued Bertha.

"If I delay longer, I shall not find my serpents again, and I could never make up for their loss."

"Ah! still those horrid serpents," exclaimed the young girl.

At last the old man bade farewell to every one and started on his journey, but not without again repeating, "Remember, my lords, that Mali the *Nât* is yours soul and body. Should you ever want him, were he at the other end of India, you have but to summon him and he will come."

The brother and sister stood for some time watching the old man on his way, and did not go indoors till he was lost from sight by a bend of the road; then their eyes were wet with tears, as though the old, despised charmer had been a regretted friend.

As for M. Bourquien, he felt rather annoyed that his children had interrupted Mali's revelation. At one moment he was half inclined to send a horseman after him to bring him back, but on consideration, he persuaded himself that the charmer's words were undoubtedly but the expression of a heart soured by the ingratitude of his royal charge,

and that it would not do to exaggerate the meaning of his words.

The same day he received a confidential message from General Wheeler, The General warned the planter that the situation of affairs was hourly becoming more serious; the mutiny seemed to be growing general; the rebels were marching against Delhi; the Nawab of Oude appeared to favour the revolt,—even Cawnpore itself was threatened. The General advised M. Bourquien to take all precautionary measures necessary. "Most fortunately," he wrote in conclusion, "Prince Doundou is our firm ally. I hadsome conversation with him last night, and he offers to protect our families and give them shelter in his palace. To-morrow I shall have all the women and children of our European garrison conveyed by boat to Bihtour. There the poor creatures will be in safety, and the men, thus reassured, will do their duty better."

"Provided," thought M. Bourquien, as Mali's words crossed his mind on reading this, "provided Nana has forgotten and forgiven."

However, without loss of time, the planter assembled all the men on his factory, and explained what he expected of them. Every man was to keep himself armed day and night, and at the first signal of alarm to assemble in the courtyard. Sentinels were to be posted round the country to give notice of any suspicious band of men. Finally the walls were to be strengthened and the gates made secure.

All these preparations alarmed André and Bertha, who accused Mali of having needlessly frightened their father.

André tried to protest, but M. Bourquien severely called him to order, telling him that it was no time for jesting.

The danger increased; every day brought news of the defection of another body of Sepoys. The Europeans of Cawnpore and the neighbourhood sent their families to Bihtour, the prince having again publicly declared that he would side with the English, and offer hospitality to all fugitives.

André and Bertha spent their time on the banks of the Ganges, sadly watching the boats laden with people going up to Bihtour. The river no longer resounded with gay laughter and merry songs. Women and children were crowded in the boats, carrying with them their few valuables, and their cries and lamentations could be heard, for all left behind them a father or husband whom they feared never to see again. A week of great anxiety thus passed by. It was now known that the troops of the Nawab of Oude were marching on Cawnpore, which had only a garrison of fifteen hundred Europeans and a few thousand Sepoys, who were scarcely to be relied on.

Every one in the factory had replied to the master's summons, and M. Bourquien could at least hope to ward off the enemy, who would not stay long before such an unimportant place.

The sentinels posted over the plain kept a good lookout, and no one was allowed to approach the walls without stating his intentions. In addition to this, M. Bourquien had given orders to all his people, and especially to André and Bertha, not to go beyond the lines of defence.

They were thus awaiting events, when one afternoon a man arrived, running at full speed, and announced to M. Bourquien that a numerous troop of horsemen had just been seen advancing towardsthe factory.

The trumpet was immediately sounded, and in a few moments two hundred armed men were ranked in the courtyard. The gates were closed, and Bertha was ordered to hide herself in the remotest room in the house. M. Bourquien sent out to reconnoitre the troops, which could now be seen about three-quarters of a mile from the factory. A few brave men offered themselves to confront the probable enemy.

A quarter of an hour later a horseman was seen galloping at full speed towards the factory, carrying a white handkerchief fastened at the end of his sabre. When he was within a few yards of the gates he stopped short.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" shouted M. Bourquien from the top of the wall.

"Ah, my lord!" replied the horseman, smiling, "do you not recognize me? I am Lieutenant Doda, the herald of his Excellency Doundou Pant Rao, by whom I am sent to you."

"What does the prince desire?" asked the planter briefly.

"His Excellency is going to Cawnpore," continued the herald, "with a body of horsemen to reinforce the troops of General Wheeler, for they say that the rebels (may God crush them!) have this morning appeared within sight of the river. His Excellency desires to concert with you about

taking measures for the protection of the road to Bihtour, in case of a movement in that direction."

"Very good," replied M. Bourquien; "tell the prince that I await him here. One of my men will go with you to give the order to our outposts to allow you to pass."

Then turning towards the courtyard, he called to one of his confidential servants, who had been promoted to the office of captain for the occasion.

"Let the principal gate be opened," said he to him, "but let every man remain on guard at his post."

A few moments later the prince's troops were before the gates. Doundou rode at their head, mounted on a richly-caparisoned horse. He was magnificently attired, and the front of his golden turban was hidden by a splendid tiara of diamonds, the diadem of the kings of India.

He rode alone through the factory gateway, making his horse curvet gracefully, and approaching M. Bourquien, saluted him with a ceremonious bow.

"Ah, by Indra! my dear Sirdar, I congratulate you on your good generalship," exclaimed he. "Good blood cannot be mistaken, and your grandsire Hector could not have made his military arrangements better than you have done. Intrenched outposts, walls strengthened—and, upon my word, here I see a band of gallant soldiers ready to do their duty. Once again, accept my hearty congratulations."

"I have done no more than circumstances require," simply replied M. Bourquien.

"Yes, certainly," resumed the prince; "but if every

one acted like you we should be sure of ultimate success."

"Oh, as for that," said the planter enthusiastically, "there is no doubt as to the matter; the cause of civilization must finally triumph. And be sure that were all the English in England and India annihilated, there would still remain ten nations in Europe ready to plant the standard of humanity over the dead bodies of these murderers of children."

"Maybe you are right," quickly remarked the prince; "but at present we have more important matters to discuss. You know that I have offered hospitality to all fugitives. A great number have already taken refuge in my palace, and at present there are at Bihtour one hundred and twelve women and three times as many children. In going to the defence of Cawnpore, as General Wheeler has ordered, I have necessarily been obliged to lessen my garrison at Bihtour; thus it is most important that I should be sure of our means of communication. This place, garrisoned as it is, and with cannon—how many pieces have you?"

"Two," replied M. Bourquien.

"Quite enough," remarked the prince. "This place can well command the road and river at the same time; especially as we shall be ready to assist you at the first signal."

"That is understood then," said the planter. "You may rely upon me; and let General Wheeler be assured of the same."

"I shall be with him in an hour's time," replied the prince, "and he will learn all from my own lips. *Au revoir*, my dear sir, and good luck to you."

And waving his hand, he made his horse curvet, and rode out of the enclosure, accompanied to the gate by M. Bourquien.

He had already gone a short distance when he suddenly turned his horse round.

"After all," cried he, "I am forgetting the most important object of my visit; in fact the very reason for which I came; it is to acquaint you with the password agreed upon by General Wheeler and myself; it is most important that you should know it, for there will be no lack of traitors."

M. Bourquien advanced a few steps towards him.

"Will you come nearer, my lord?" said Doundou; it is a State secret, and I must whisper it in your ear."

The planter went and stood close by the prince's saddle-bow; then Doundou, bending down towards him, cried in a terrible voice, "Vengeance and Peichva!" at the same time he plunged a stiletto, which was concealed in his sleeve, between the Frenchman's shoulders; and as though struck by lightning, M. Bourquien fell to the ground at the horse's feet.

Just as these terrible words were uttered, as though at a given signal, the prince's cavalry dashed at full speed into the courtyard, which they quickly filled.

Then ensued a fearful scene of slaughter. The men of Gandapour, surprised by the suddenness of the attack, were mercilessly slain. In vain did a few of them take refuge

As though struck by lightning M. Bourquien fell to the ground.

Page 62.

for a moment in the house; the murderers soon overcame them.

André, who stood in the centre of the enclosure during the interview, had seen his father fall; but the treason, so skilfully planned, had been so sudden, that the poor youth failed to grasp its reality until he saw the horsemen trampling under foot his father's body. Then, seized with fear, he listened only to the instinct of self-preservation, and fled. He had just succeeded in reaching the wall of the enclosure and was climbing it to make off into the country, over which the shades of night were beginning to fall, when he heard piercing screams which could come from no other than Bertha: "Come to me, papa! André!" she cried.

With one bound André was again in the courtyard. Just as he touched the ground, he saw two ruffians, one of whom was carrying Bertha, who struggled bravely as she uttered her despairing cries. Without a moment's reflection the young man ran to his sister's help; but one of the men seeing him, felled him to the ground with a stunning blow. The scoundrels then carried their prize to Doundou, who stood in the middle of the courtyard feasting his eyes on the scene of carnage.

At sight of Bertha he gave a triumphant leer, and pointing towards her, shouted in a ringing voice, "Let no one touch that child. The noble blood of the Peichva flows in her veins, and evil be upon him who dares to shed it."

"Where is the young princess to be conducted?" asked one of the officers.

"Let her be taken under safe escort to my palace, at

Bihtour," replied the prince, "and see that she be treated with all the respect due to a niece of the Peichvas." Then turning towards his men, "Set fire to this place, and let not one stone be left upon another of the traitor's house. And now to Cawnpore!"

"Long live Nana Sahib! long live the Peichva!" shouted a thousand voices. And having set fire to the factory which they had previously pillaged, the band went on their way, leaving behind them nothing but corpses lying among smouldering ruins,—there, where but a few days before had reigned peace, happiness, and prosperity.

"The flames quickly had the better of the grand old factory of Gandapour."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

THE flames quickly had the better of the grand old factory of Gandapour, the pride of all the country round; of its lofty gables, its broad façades, and its long lines of elegant verandahs, nothing now remained but a vast furnace, whose pale embers flickered through the darkness of the night.

A silence of death reigned in the enclosure, which was strewn with dead bodies. The soldiers of the ferocious Nana had well done their horrible work! They had shown no mercy; and before taking their departure, the few

wounded who still rallied were brutally despatched. Neither age nor sex was spared. In their blind fury they had massacred Europeans and Hindoos, women and children. Jackals and hyenas were already partaking of the feast so liberally provided for them.

Nevertheless one victim, one alone, had escaped the implacable vengeance of Nana. André, stunned by the blow he had received, had fallen at the base of the courtyard wall, and his motionless position had shielded him from the murderous knife of the assassins. But though badly wounded, he was not dead, and after a few hours of unconsciousness the cold night air revived him.

He heaved a sigh, and gazed around him with a look of bewilderment.

"What a frightful dream!" thought he; "what would I not give to be rid of this horrible night-mare!"

Suddenly a smouldering brand revived, and for an instant lit up the scene of desolation. That moment was enough to recall André to the terrible reality.

"Father! Bertha!" he murmured, and then burst into tears. Long and bitterly he wept, and accused himself of having been by his cowardice an instrument of the catastrophe; he even asked God wherefore he had been spared to survive a calamity such as this.

Then he tried to account for the reason which could have induced Prince Doundou, their friend and neighbour, to perpetrate such an odious crime. His young, loyal mind could find no good reason to justify the wretch. He then bethought himself that he could only have escaped by

a miracle, and that undoubtedly the murderers would soon return and kill him. He was determined to try and make his escape; but where was he to go? where take refuge? He made an effort to stand up; but feeling very weak he again sank on the ground.

The sky was now gemmed with myriads of stars; André, familiar with the tropical constellations, noticed that those above the Eastern horison were beginning to wane before the pale brilliancy of the zodiacal light. A few hours more and day would break. He must get away from here as soon as possible. Dragging himself along the ground, he made towards a cistern placed in a corner of the courtyard, and at last reached it after a desperate effort. After having quenched his burning thirst with several deep draughts of water, he tore his handkerchief in strips, which he soaked with water, and bound round his forehead.

The poor youth was thus occupied, when suddenly he heard a noise which made him hold his breath. He thought he could distinguish a footstep in the courtyard near him. His blood curdled in his veins.

He was not mistaken in the sound. There, at a few steps from him, he could faintly discern the figure of a man walking slowly about. From time to time, the stranger stooped over a body stretched on the ground, raised the head of the corpse, seemed to examine it attentively, then let it fall back, muttering something to himself.

"There is no doubt about it," thought André; "this man has been sent by Nana Sahib to finish the victims. He will find me here directly, and nothing then can save me

from death." And thus thinking, the young man crouched down in the shadow of the cistern.

However, the mysterious stranger appeared to grow weary of his examinations. He left off, and standing up, his eyes seemed to pierce through the darkness as though to assure himself that no corpse had escaped him.

All at once André fancied that the man pronounced his name, but in such a muffled tone that it was but an indistinct murmur.

Once again the same words were uttered, and this time the young man distinctly heard "Andhra Sahib!"

His heart beat wildly. What was he to think? Was this a friend or an assassin?

But this time there is no longer any doubt about it; the voice becomes more distinct, and André has recognized the charmer.

"Mali! Mali!" he cries, and a moment after he is in the arms of the old man, who kisses him fervently.

"Ah, Andhra," said Mali softly, "I had given up all hopes of finding you. May Parbati be praised, who has guided my steps!"

André could say nothing but "Mali! Mali!" as the tears rained from his eyes. "It is Mali, it is life and hope."

"Yes, it is old Mali," continued the charmer, "Old Mali who loves you, and would give his life if needs be to save his dear protector. I owe you everything, my beloved master; and the life you gave me back is not your most precious gift. Since the day that I was repulsed by my

royal pupil, he who has become the most infamous of traitors, since that day I have wandered over the land, my hand and heart turned against humanity. Thenceforth friendship, goodness, gentleness, and compassion were but idle words to me; but in stretching out your hand to help the poor forsaken outcast, you gave me back these treasures. I was nothing better than a beast living in the midst of my reptiles, and you have made me a man. Oh that I could have warded off the blow that threatened you! The whole day I stood on the other side of the river opposite Gandapour without being able to find a boat to come and warn you of Nana's treason. I was forced to remain a powerless spectator of this horrible tragedy. Not till to-night, when, filled with rage and indignation, I was walking along the banks of the Ganges, did I chance to find a fisherman's boat moored among the reeds. Full of despair I came here, but Mighty Mahadeo has guided my footsteps. The boat is on the bank. We must fly now, and very quickly, for daylight will bring back the brigands."

"Fly!" exclaimed André, "and my father and sister?"

"Where are they? I know not," sadly replied the old man. "For the past hour I have been anxiously examining every corpse,—not one has escaped me,—and nowhere have I seen your father or sister."

"My sister! Ah, yes! I remember I saw her carried away alive by two bandits, and it was in trying to save her that I was struck down."

"In that case, do not be uneasy," said Mali; "I know Nana Sahib. Your sister, the grand-daughter of a princess

of Maharatta blood, will be respected by him. He will shut her up in a palace to educate her according to Brahmin principles, and later on he will marry her to some Rajah among his allies."

"My poor Bertha!" exclaimed the young man. "But if my father is indeed dead, I must at least kneel beside his corpse and kiss his brow."

"Alas!" said the charmer, "even that last consolation is denied you. If I am not mistaken, after having murdered him, they threw his body into the flames. Just now when I was searching among the rubbish, to my horror I discovered a half-burnt body, round which were still left a few shreds of European clothing."

This was too much for André, and the poor boy fainted in Mali's arms.

The old charmer gently placed him on the ground, and seemed to be considering. Then, as though seized by a sudden inspiration, he stripped one of the corpses of a turban and wide canvas *dhouti*, and taking André tenderly on his knee he took off his clothes and replaced them by those of the Hindoo. Then going up to a flaming brand, he partly burnt the young Frenchman's clothes and scattered them over the ground.

During these operations the youth had given no signs of life. The charmer tried to bring him to, but in vain.

However, day was breaking, and there was no time to be lost. The old man, collecting his strength, raised André, placed him on his shoulder, and then with difficulty he made his way to the river side.

He placed André on his shoulder.

Page 70.

Like the good Samaritan, who redeemed all his faults by his charity, the old charmer, the despised sorcerer, the vile companion of serpents, was assuredly thus raised as high by his devotion as his royal pupil, the respected prince, the much-sought-after companion, had fallen low.

"He saw, with horror, that these moving forms were none other than serpents."

CHAPTER VII.

ANDRÉ'S EDUCATION.

A MISERABLE dwelling indeed was the old charmer's hut. Four stakes supporting a thatched roof covered with creeping plants constituted its sole architecture. The walls were nothing but bamboo mats nailed together between the posts. In the centre of one of the divisions an opening was arranged; this was the door, before which hung an old piece of drapery.

The interior of the hut was scarcely more luxurious. The well-levelled clay floor was partially covered with a mat. The corner of the hut was crammed with baskets,

wands, and tinsel, the charmer's whole fortune, whilst a rope-bed supported on four low feet—a *tcharpoy*, as the Hindoos call it—stood at the other end.

For a week poor André had lain on this primitive couch. It seemed as though death had but left him a moment's respite to make his suffering more protracted. He had been unconscious for this last week, and a prey to incessant delirium.

Without allowing himself to be disheartened, the good Mali had cared for him with almost maternal devotion, and ere long he was able to hope that the young man's robust constitution would withstand all these terrible shocks. In fact, the fever visibly decreased, and a day came when the invalid, though still unconscious, was able to sleep quietly.

The same day Mali eagerly took advantage of this opportunity to leave his young charge for a short time, and go to the neighbouring village to buy food.

He had only been absent a few hours when André at last awoke from his long slumber. On opening his eyes he experienced the same stupefied sensation as when he regained consciousness in the courtyard of the burning factory. But if the scene which he there gazed upon was horrible, the spectacle now before him surpassed the limits of the fantastic.

Shut up in the small hut, the door of which Mali had carefully closed on leaving, by the dim light streaming through the cracks of the mats, the young man saw countless strange forms moving around him. Soon his eyes grew accustomed to the twilight, and he distinguished with

horror that these moving forms were none other than serpents. They were everywhere: André saw them gliding hissing along the ground, coiling themselves round the posts, or balancing across the roof.

The poor invalid, almost petrified with terror, shrank under the blanket which covered his naked body. He dared not cry out nor move. All at once a cautious step was heard at the door, and a hand gently raised the drapery.

Once again the young man recognized the charmer, and cried, "Mali! Mali!"

Mali entered, and sweeping aside with his foot all the reptiles, who quickly took refuge in their baskets, he went up to the young man.

"At last!" exclaimed he. "So you have come back to life again, and this time for good, have you not?"

"But, my dear Mali," said André, still trembling; "where can you have brought me?"

"To my home, dear Andhra," replied the charmer. "The place is neither fine nor comfortable, but it was the only safe refuge I had to offer you. Although we are but two miles from Cawnpore, no one will think of coming to look for you here, and not even a Sepoy would dare to face the old sorcerer's garrison. My sentinels seem to have frightened you. But we will not stay long here; and as soon as you are ready to start—"

"Oh, now, at once!" interrupted André impetuously. "I assure you I feel quite strong again, and if you will give me my clothes—"

"Gently, gently," said the old man, smiling. "All in good time. We will talk over that presently. Let me first of all tell you the news which will give you back your legs sooner than any of my medicines."

"My father is alive!" said André.

"Maybe yes, maybe no," replied Mali. "Directly we came here I sent to Cawnpore a trustworthy lad, who often goes with me to fairs. It was Miana, the monkey-shower; you will know him soon. The young rogue is as nimble and cunning as his pupil. Thanks to his drolleries, he was able to penetrate right into the midst of the rebels, who are besieging Cawnpore, and he has learnt all I wanted to know. First of all, Nana's people believe that you are dead, and that your body was consumed by the flames, for they could find nothing but the shreds of burnt clothing. This is a grand point gained, and one which I carefully arranged before our flight. Besides this they are certain that your father has escaped them, when the factory was being pillaged, after Nana had treacherously struck M. Bourquien with his poignard, the bandits rushed forward without paying any further attention to the apparently dead man. But when they returned to mutilate his corpse he had disappeared. In vain they followed the traces of blood as far as the jungle; your father was so well concealed they could not find him. Where is he now? That is more than I know; at any rate he has escaped his enemies."

"Thank God!" exclaimed André. "Oh, Mali, we must set out at once to look for him."

"Now these," continued the charmer, "are the two important pieces of information brought by Miana. The third point is that Mdlle. Bertha was indeed carried off as we thought, but she is safe and sound. Besides this, it is known that Nana, after having had the intention of sending her to Jhansi, had her conducted to a Rajah in the north of Hindoostan. To whom? Here again I am in doubt; perhaps to one in Oude or Gürwăl, but we shall know in time."

"Yes, yes, Mali," said André, "we will set out to look for them. I must find Bertha and my father."

"Certainly, my dear master," said Mali; "but before thinking of rescuing others, we must think of saving ourselves, and that is not such an easy matter. First of all, I beg you will excuse your servant if he entreat you to obey him in everything he is about to propose to you. This is your only chance of being saved."

"Do you not already know you may rely upon that?" replied the young man with firmness. "There is no master nor servant here now; there is a feeble, powerless youth who entrusts himself to a loyal honest man."

"Well, be it so," said the charmer; "your words reassure me. This, then, is my plan. If you were to leave here with me in your European clothes we should not go two miles before we were discovered and massacred. You must therefore adopt the Hindoo dress."

"I should like nothing better," said André, of whose preference in this matter we are aware.

"Very good," continued Mali; "but that is not enough.

In perilous times like these, everything is suspected; at the first village we come to they will be sure to cry out, 'Who is that young man the sorcerer has with him?' and I shall be obliged to reply, 'It is my son whom I am taking about with me, and who is already my equal in the art of serpent-charming.'"

"But that is impossible, my good Mali," interrupted André. "How can you expect me to be able to charm serpents?"

"Reassure yourself on that matter," resumed the old man: I will undertake to make you as skilful as myself in a few lessons. The only important point to decide is whether you will agree to play this part with me, and if you will allow me thus to do away with, in public, all marks of respect which I owe you."

"Anything you like," exclaimed André, "on condition that you will help me to find my father and my dear Bertha."

"We will do our utmost," said Mali. "At present, since all is decided, and you are going to obey me, you will take this potion which I have prepared for your use; it will make you sleep till to-morrow morning."

"With pleasure, my good Mali."

André swallowed the bitter potion at one draught without making a grimace; then, with his heart full of joy and gratitude, just as he was about to lie down on the couch, he suddenly exclaimed, "Come and shake hands with me, my dear old friend;" and when the old man had pressed him with emotion to his heart, "Now good-night till to-morrow," said he, and at once fell asleep.

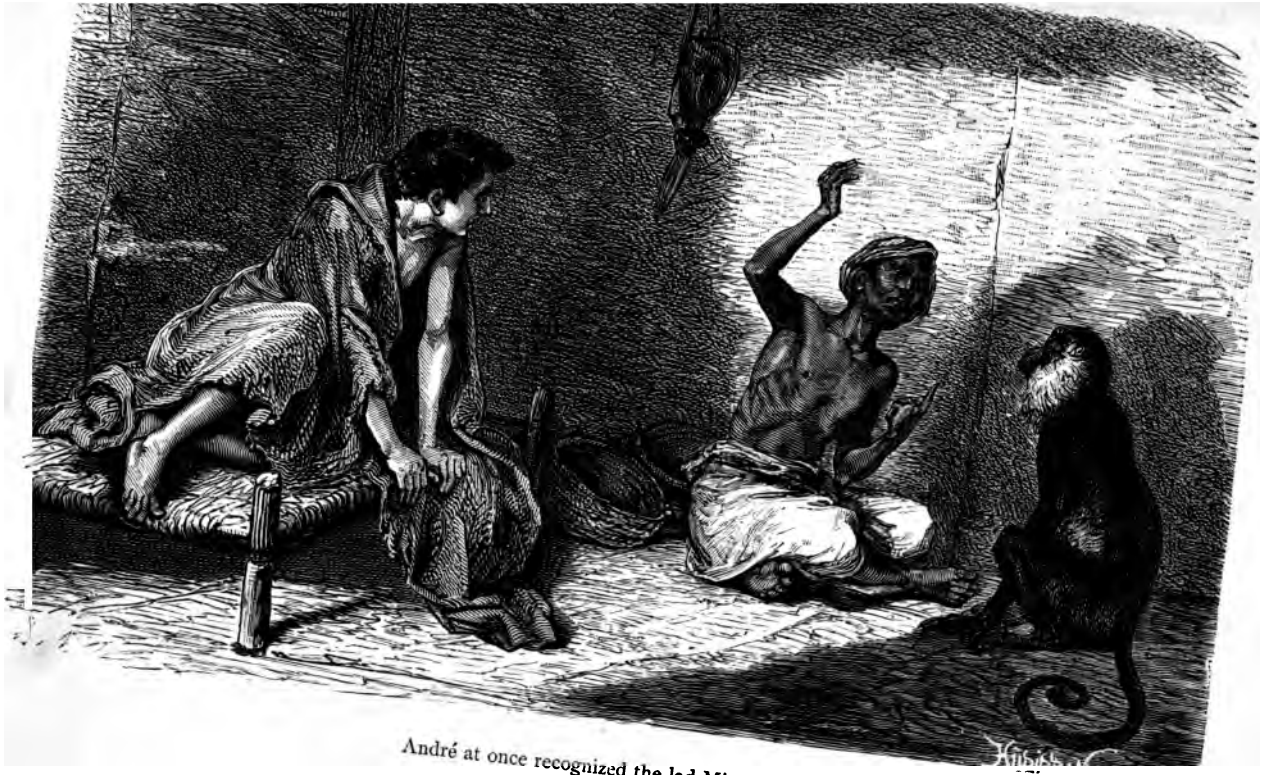
Faithful in all respects to his promise, André did not awake till late the following day. He felt refreshed and hearty, and on opening his eyes his first thought was to thank God, who, in the midst of his despair, had sent him such a devoted friend. Sitting up he gazed with a look of happiness on the humble roof which sheltered him. The sun coming in at the wide-open door gilded the bamboo walls, and played on the matting. How beautiful was Mali's hut thus!

Soon André perceived that he was not alone: two individuals, unknown to him, were squatting on the mat, and seemed to be engaged in a lively but subdued conversation. The first of these strangers was a young Hindoo, a handsome youth, about André's age; the second was a fine monkey of the Langour race.

André at once recognized in this group the lad Miana, whose profession the charmer had explained to him the previous evening, together with his exploits at Cawnpore.

Miana was on his knees before the monkey, holding an animated conversation with him by gestures, to which the monkey replied by making grimaces and winking. Without knowing the language of dumb animals, André at once understood that the young Hindoo was trying to quiet the big monkey, who protested against such restraint. Thinking that he was the cause of this misunderstanding between the two friends, André cried out quickly, "Good day, Miana."

Miana turned a somersault with the agility of an



André at once recognized the lad Miana.

acrobat, and without evincing the least surprise that the young Frenchman had recognized him. "Good day, Andhra," said he familiarly; "how are you?"

The acquaintance was thus made without other formal introduction, and a few minutes later the two lads were quite like old friends.

Before going out, the charmer had left some clothes for André. Miana helped his new friend to put on the ample *dhouti*, and to roll the light turban round his head, but his bust and feet were left bare.

"Where are the shoes, and a vest?" said André, with surprise.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Miana; "one can easily see that you are a high and mighty lord. But, my dear, beggars of our age wear neither vest nor shoes. At the most, when it is cold, you can roll yourself up in one of Mali's serpent-blankets; but as for your feet there is no remedy; it is forbidden by our masters, the Brahmins, to vile, unclean *Nâts* to wear shoes, unless by special dispensation. I am not aware whether the high priest of Bhilsa has granted you that favour as well as Father Mali, but it is a mere nothing. Our master (for Mali is now your master as well as mine) has told me to be sure and explain to you all the details upon which it seems your life depends. No eye, not even the most practised, must be able to detect that you are anything but a beggar."

"Be it so," said André, with a half-sigh. "I will do whatever you wish, since it must be so."

"Yes, my friend, it must be so," repeated Miana; "but

you may be sure that we will do all in our power to spare you any trouble. In short, you will soon grow accustomed to our life. Your feet will get hardened, and very soon you will not feel the roughness of the ground more than I do. Then your uncovered body will soon be bronzed by the sun, and we shall have no fear of your white skin betraying your race."

When Mali returned he was pleased to find the two lads jesting and laughing before the cabin door. Miana's big monkey provided the chief fund of entertainment. His master desired him to give a representation of his talents on the spot. Hanouman—that was the monkey's name—very complacently displayed his knowledge,—pretending to be dead, brandishing a wooden sword, or climbing in a second to the top of the roof; and all to André's great amusement.

"Come, come, master," said the old man at this sight, "I see that Miana has already begun your education. He is quite right, for we must make all speed with it. In a few days this country will be too hot for us; we must lose no time in making our escape."

"I am quite ready," said André. "Let us go at once. First of all, where are we going."

"According to the information I received this morning, there is but one direction for us to follow. Cawnpore, Jhansi, and Agra, are besieged by the rebels; Delhi, Meerut, and Luknow are already in their hands. Thus we can only fly towards the north. The Himalayan princes have declared in favour of the English, and the

cantons of Mussourie serve as refuge to all Europeans flying from the valley of the Ganges. It is true that the road from Cawnpore to Mussourie is now blocked; thus we shall be obliged to make a *détour* towards the north-west, and cross the Térai. You no doubt know that this immense marshy forest which skirts the base of the Himalayas is abandoned by human beings, and its sole inhabitants are innumerable wild beasts, and troops of wild elephants and rhinoceroses. On leaving these pestilential marshes we must cross the Dehra Doun, another region more inhabited, but not less dangerous. You see that perils crowd around us."

"What matter?" said André. "We must fly; and I still hope to find more pity from tigers than from monsters in the shape of human beings who delight in slaughter. Nothing daunts me; I am ready for anything."

"Very good, my lord," resumed Mali; "and in order to save precious time I am going at once to give you a few lessons in your new profession." And addressing himself to the young Hindoo, "Come, Miana," said he, "put away your monkey, and bring the baskets; we are going to give a general rehearsal."

When the baskets were brought, Mali opened the one in which lay the beautiful cobra Sâprani; then taking his toumril, he explained the mechanism of this primitive instrument.

The toumril is perhaps one of the earliest flutes invented by man, for it is found figuring on monuments more than forty centuries old. It is a short whistle, the upper part

of which is inserted in a calabash, which is itself provided with two short reeds pierced with holes.

"It is useless," said Mali to the young Frenchman, "to attempt to play a complicated air; content yourself with simply blowing through it, and raising one finger after the other from the holes; the continuous and monotonous modulation produces the best effect on our reptiles, who are not difficult to please with regard to harmony. When once the serpent has heard the noise, it is curious to try and account for it; in order to do that it raises itself, and puffing out its hood to maintain its equilibrium, tries to reach the toumril, the end of which is ornamented, as you see, by pieces of bright-coloured glass, to fix its attention. Thus fascinated, it will balance itself to the movement of your instrument: in a word, it will dance, as the ignorant say. But now try yourself."

At the first sound that André drew from the toumril, Sâprani, who was asleep, quickly raised her head, came out of the basket, and placed herself inquisitively in front of the young man, who, keeping the end of the toumril before her, made her dance thus round the hut.

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed Mali and Miana; "that is capital—very good."

"It is very amusing," said André; "I could never have believed that it was so easy."

"We shall presently go on to more difficult exercises. First of all we will have all our pupils out, and you shall charm the whole band as you did Sâprani."

The ground was soon covered with a multi-coloured

swarm of serpents of all sizes, who, attracted by the sound of the toumril, raised themselves round André. The circle gradually grew smaller, and the young man, seized with fear, threw down his instrument, and took refuge in the hut, leaving his pupils very much surprised at his sudden disappearance; but Miana's peals of laughter soon brought him out again. Taking courage, he picked up the toumril, and succeeded in acquitting his task to the satisfaction of his teachers.

The lessons were continued for two days. André set to work with such good-will, that on the third day Mali declared he might henceforth confront the most fastidious public. Not only had he learnt to charm serpents, but also to perform several very complicated and wonderful tricks, which it does not here pertain to us to divulge.

"Springing over his stove, he dropped on one knee before André."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE JUNGLE.

UNDER cover of a dark night the three fugitives left the charmer's hut. In addition to the serpent baskets, they carried with them provisions for several days; thus they were heavily laden. On pretext that André's feet were still too tender to walk comfortably, Miana had taken the young man's heaviest burden from his shoulders, and in exchange, given Hanouman into his charge, who, disdaining to be carried like any ordinary monkey, capered nimbly along beside the little band of light-hearted travellers.

In fact, gaiety seemed to reign in the caravan. Sustained

by the hope that he would soon see his beloved father and sister again, and also by that inexhaustible fund of self-confidence, the great privilege of youth, André had forgotten all his troubles. In order to leave him little time for reflection, Mali endeavoured to interest him in his plans for their proceedings. As for Miana, his natural gaiety had never received the least shock, and he gave full vent to the delight which this impromptu journey caused him.

Nevertheless the pleasure of starting had by no means caused any necessary prudential measures to be neglected, and long before daybreak the little band were far into the depths of the jungle.

Mali, with much wisdom, had decided that they should avoid the roads and villages as long as they were in the neighbourhood of Cawnpore. André was so well known for thirty miles round, that they could not fail to meet some one who, well or ill-intentioned, would see through his disguise, and thus spread the news of his escape.

The provisions they had with them would allow the fugitives to cross this dangerous zone. For greater precaution they travelled during the night and rested in the daytime in the most secluded part they could find.

This first night the travellers made a very long march. Mali did not give the signal to halt till they had reached a deeply-entrenched nullah, at the bottom of which flowed a clear stream.

The site was most favourable. The fugitives camped at the bottom of the nullah, where they had some difficulty in taking their baggage; but once there a whole regiment

might have passed almost overhead without suspecting their presence.

André, worn out with fatigue, stretched himself with a feeling of infinite relief on the carpet of fine grass which covered the banks of the stream, whilst his companions organized the camp. Mali spread out the blankets, unpacked the baskets, and arranged his serpents, and Miana, with the characteristic skill of all Hindoos, set to work to make a fireplace and collect the necessary combustibles. Four stones formed the hearth, and soon a bright, clear fire of glowing embers was lighted; a flat iron dish was placed on the stove, and in a few minutes Miana had made a dozen very palatable Indian cakes or *tchaptis*.

"Will his high and mighty lordship deign to look upon his servant who brings him his dinner?" said he, going towards André. "To my great regret I have been unable to vary the dishes; the first course is *tchaptis*, the second is *tchaptis*, and the third is *tchaptis*. I hope that for this time your lordship will be indulgent, and that you will pardon your humble slave." And springing over his stove he dropped on one knee before André, and presented the cakes to him with great mock humility.

"By divine Rama!" exclaimed Mali indignantly, "I believe this impudent young beggar Miana means to make fun of you, my lord. My stick shall teach him to—"

"No, no, dear master," said André, laughing, and still stretched at his ease; "Miana is perfectly justified in making game of me. I allow myself to be waited upon as though I had still servants, and I lie here whilst you, an

old man, are working. You must both of you excuse me this time. I am very weary after our long march, and am not yet accustomed to these clothes, but henceforth I shall expect to share your work at all times, and not only in public."

"But, Andhra," exclaimed Miana, "it was only my fun. You know very well that a *Nât* like myself is much too proud to wait upon a Sahib."

"No, no," continued André, "you are my brother and not my servant, and the only master here is Mali, whom we must both obey."

The charmer tried to protest against this, but the young man silenced him, and as they were all dying of hunger, the repast was quickly despatched. After the frugal dinner and a draught of water from the brook, they each lay down on their blanket, and prepared to sleep till evening.

"Supposing any one should surprise us whilst we are asleep," said André, "we shall be caught without a chance of defending ourselves. Would it not be better to sleep in turns, leaving one to act as sentinel?"

"That would be little good," said Miana; "we are all too tired, and besides we have a sentinel who will not allow us to be surprised; Hanouman, like all monkeys, is a great coward; the least suspicious noise, whether from man or beast, alarms him, and he sets up his *Hou! hou!* which would soon awaken us. Good-night;" and setting the example, he rolled himself round in his blanket.

No suspicious noise alarmed Hanouman, and our travellers were able to rest undisturbed.

In the evening they had another repast, and André insisted on being initiated into the art of making *tchaptis*, the mysteries of which he had soon penetrated; the art consisting in kneading the barley with water, and flattening it out in the shape of a pancake on a red-hot iron plate.

As soon as the stars were visible in the heavens, Mali gave the order for departure, and each took up his burden and again entered the jungle.

Perhaps the reader, following André in his painful Odyssey, pictures him now entering a dense forest, through the thick foliage of whose gigantic trees, worthy of tropical vegetation, not a single ray of light can penetrate. The Indian jungle is not a forest of this kind. The trees here are scarce and stunted, and the mass of vegetation is composed of nothing but thorny, prickly brushwood, forming impassable barriers, but separated one from another by grassy plots, often of considerable extent. This is the jungle, properly speaking; which is quite distinct from the forest. In reality, the jungle is but the abandoned plains of a fertile soil, which the work of man will one day turn to good account. It covers a vast surface of India, though this fine country, with its two hundred millions of inhabitants, all agriculturists, is one of the best cultivated countries in the world. Not that India has no forests; on the contrary, its forests extend over an immense area, and are unrivalled for their picturesque grandeur.

Travelling in the jungle is thus comparatively easy, and André, already somewhat inured, now walked as nimbly as his companions.

Besides this, the fugitives rested from time to time, and Mali tried to enliven the halt by some story, or a few words of encouragement; the remainder of the time they walked on in silence, out of precaution.

"If we continue walking in this way," said he to the young people, when at break of day they were resting before entering upon the last stage of their journey, "we shall have passed Lucknow to-morrow, and then for a few days we can take the public road without fear of being recognized, for it is indispensable for us to renew our stock of provisions before we enter the terrible Térai. So a little more courage, my sons, and onward we go; we must not let daylight surprise us here."

They all three rose, and were about to take up their burdens, when a measured sound of bells tinkling gaily in the silence of the night startled them.

"Do you hear that?" said Miana; "It is a traveller coming this way. We shall be caught."

In truth the sound rapidly drew nearer, and they could already distinguish the murmur of voices above the noise of the bells.

"Throw down your burden," said Mali to André, "and hide yourself in that underwood. Above all, whatever happens, do not stir."

André unhesitatingly obeyed the charmer, and glided under the bushes, whilst his companions lay down on the ground beside the baskets.

A moment later, an enormous black mass came out into the clearing, and rapidly approached them. It was a huge

elephant, carrying a heavy bell on either side, which rang with its movements. Elephants tread so quietly that it is the custom thus to suspend very large bells at their sides when they are travelling, in order to warn carriages of their approach.

This elephant was, in fact, equipped for a journey; for besides the bells it carried a ladder, and its back was hidden beneath a closed *haodah*, an immense case like an omnibus which would easily have held several persons.

Men on horseback surrounded and preceded the elephant. One of them, their chief undoubtedly, rode at their head, and gave vent aloud to his ill-humour.

"By red Kali," he was saying, "this cursed jungle seems to have no end! May Siva cast all guides into hell, and all the village chiefs go with them! You shall all hang for this. That wretched animal of a guide coolly brings us the wrong way, and then you let him sneak off all at once. What would our master say if he saw me groping about here? Is there not one among you donkeys capable of distinguishing north from south?"

It appeared that the captain was no better able to find his whereabouts than his men, for he looked toward the horizon, already streaked with the faint light of dawn, without being any the wiser. All at once his glance fell upon the two beggars, who lay quite still beside their baskets. He spurred on his horse and went towards them.

"Salâm! good people," said he; "can you oblige me by showing me the way to Lucknow?"

Mali and Miana quickly sprang to their feet, and

"The pale light you see yonder."

Page 91.

bowed respectfully to the stranger. Then the charmer speaking, said,—

"Dread lord, you have but to tell your driver to turn his elephant's head towards the pale light you see yonder, and in less than an hour you will be under the walls of Lucknow the glorious."

"Thanks for your information," replied the captain; "but perhaps you are going the same way; in that case you can put us in the right road." Then, regarding the old man more attentively, "It seems to me I know your face. Are you not Mali, the great serpent-charmer, the old friend and counsellor of our master?"

"I am indeed Mali," simply replied the charmer; "but your servant does not remember your lordship."

"What! you have forgotten Doda, he to whom the queen-mother gave the charge of the prince's *houkas?*"

"Ah! now I well remember; but that was so long ago."

"Yes, it is long ago, my poor Mali. The goddess Maya is blind; whilst thou art fallen from grandeur into poverty, I have risen. The other day I was but *tchoubdar*, Prince Doundou's herald, now I am captain of the army of the Peichva, the sovereign master of both Indias. My gallant conduct at the siege of Cawnpore won me this signal honour."

"Is our lord Nana, whom God protect, now master of Cawnpore?" questioned the charmer.

"Yes, that hive of infidels has fallen into our hands," said the captain. "They made an obstinate resistance, and at one time we feared we should have to give in. But you

well know how fertile our beloved Prince Nana is in expedients. Having been intimately acquainted with General Wheeler, he made honourable proposals to him. He offered to allow him to retire with arms and baggage, and to provide boats to take away the women and children. General Wheeler hesitated at first; then Nana Sahib had an interview with him, and the old imbecile took in everything he said. The following day the English soldiers passed in defile before us, carrying arms and baggage, followed by their trembling wives and children. We presented arms to them, and they all embarked. Scarcely had their boats reached the middle of the river,—I laugh still when I think of it,—when Nana went on to the Stati Chowra Quay, and waved his hand to the vanquished, to which they replied by taking off their hats. Of course you can understand that Nana did not mean any politeness to those sons of dogs: his waving his hand was but a signal. In the twinkling of an eye we unmasked our batteries and fired on them. The boats were soon swamped, half the people in them were drowned, and the other half saved themselves by swimming, and sought refuge on the shore, where we despatched them with our swords. It was a fine sight, the river was red with blood!"

"Wretch!" muttered Mali.

"I beg your pardon?" said the captain.

"I said," replied Mali, "that God avenges those He loves."

"Yes, indeed," continued Doda, "one cannot mistake the signal protection of mighty Kali in this case. I was very

much annoyed to be obliged to leave the scene just when the fun was best, but Nana has taken into his head to protect the daughter of Bourquien Sahib, on pretext of her grandmother being a Holkar. He commissioned me to have her conducted to Lucknow to the court of Nawab Nazim, and I answer for her life with my head. But are you not going to Lucknow, as I asked you just now? We might make the journey together."

"Impossible, my lord," said Mali. "I am going in the opposite direction to the fair at Hardwar with my companion, Miana, and I cannot change my route."

"Ah, well, be it so," replied the captain; "besides here is daybreak. Good-bye, then, and thanks!" With these words Doda rejoined his companions, who had already taken the direction indicated by Mali.

Trembling with fear and scarcely daring to breathe, the two Hindoos stood motionless, listening to the last tinkling of bells as it grew fainter and fainter in the distance. Then only did they call André.

The young man bounded from his hiding-place, and threw himself in the charmer's arms.

"Oh, Mali!" he exclaimed, "I have heard everything. My sister Bertha was there! and those wretches are carrying her away. How could I have stopped there motionless when I felt her so near? Perhaps it would have given her courage could she have seen me."

"Do you think so, my lord?" said Mali quickly. "Had you shown yourself we should all have been lost, without saving your sister, who would have witnessed another

scene of slaughter. You have heard there is no pity in the hearts of these tigers."

"True, that alone restrained me. Still I have heard that Bertha lives and that Nana protects her. Why or for what end I know not; but his clemency will allow us to save my sister. Let us press on, let us press on; I am all impatience to reach Mussourie. We must surely find people there who will help us in our task."

"He worked the boat with a vigour quite surprising in a man of his age."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FESTIVAL AT NANDAPOOR.

THE unexpected meeting with Nana's emissaries warned our fugitives that all danger of being discovered was not yet at an end; thus they took greater precaution than ever, travelling only through the densest parts of the jungle. They marched the whole night without stopping, and passed the day in some almost impenetrable thicket.

Fortunately, no further encounters took place, and on the fifth day the travellers reached the outskirts of the vast jungle. Before them now lay a smiling landscape. The gently undulating plain extended to the horizon, where,

above the dark line of forests, could be seen the blue crest of a spur of the Himalayas. Splendid crops covered the land, and here and there were villages surrounded by rich orchards. Large herds of cattle and buffaloes were grazing in extensive paddocks, and the far-off voices of herdsmen calling to each other at certain intervals could be heard in the distance.

Peaceful as was the scene, it did not seem to tempt our travellers, who had come to a standstill at the outskirt of the jungle, and were concerting together as to the best measures to take.

"It is no good hesitating," said the charmer; "whatever fears we may have, we cannot draw back now. That black line which you see yonder is the Térai. Three days' march will bring us there. But we must renew our provisions before we go further. There is no way of doing that but to make for those villages, and as we have no money we must work for what we want."

"Ah! that is just what I dread most," interrupted André, "as long as I had no other spectators than you two, it all seemed easy enough, but now I begin to feel nervous. Only think, the least error on my part may cost you your life, for in betraying myself I shall betray you."

"Don't be alarmed," said Miana; "I can tell you we shall have something to do not to allow ourselves to be eclipsed by you; and had I not lately taught Hanouman a quite original trick, I should feel very uneasy myself."

"Well," interposed Mali, "we cannot draw back now. The memory of those you love will protect and sustain you

in these severe trials. But one word more. You know that I am to pass for your father and master, I must therefore treat you accordingly, and you will not be offended if my words are wanting in respect?"

"That is already agreed, my good Mali," replied the young man.

"Forward then," said the charmer, "and let us be on our guard."

After an hour's march they found themselves on the banks of a magnificent river, proudly rolling its waters, like all the tributaries of the Ganges, between high perpendicular banks.

"This is the Gogra," said Mali, "one of the finest tributaries of our father Ganges. Its blue limpid waters descend from among the glaciers which cover the brow of Mount Kaïlas, the dwelling-place of our gods. Although it is not deep, and I well know a ford, I shall take good care not to let you run any risk in that way, for its waters abound with sharp-teethed gavials, more terrible still than ordinary crocodiles. If I am not mistaken that town we can see yonder is Nandapoor, the city of Siva's steed. In that case, by following up the river on this side, we are sure to find a ferryman who will take us across."

A few minutes later they knocked at the door of the ferryman's hut. An old man appeared, and without saying a word led them to his boat, moored on the shore. When they had taken their seats, he placed himself in the bows, and provided with a long pole, worked the boat with a vigour quite surprising for a man of his age.

"Father," Mali asked him, "is not that Nandapoor I see yonder, with the lofty *mandil* surmounted by a golden sun?"

"You are right," replied the ferryman. "You are no doubt going to the *mêla*, which is held during two days before the *tchaori* of Nanda. On hearing of the success of our armies against the vile English, the high-priest ordained that offerings should be made to the Red Goddess, and the country people are flocking in from all parts to be present at this solemnity. Have you not been invited to take part in the festival?"

"Yes and no, father," said the charmer. "I have indeed heard that the *mêla* will be brilliant; but I am not aware whether the high-priest will require our services."

"Yet there is a young man who would make a fine figure in the *Nanda Poudja*," continued the ferryman, pointing to André. "Is he a *Nât* like yourself?"

"Certainly," quickly replied Mali; "he is my son."

"Ah, indeed! Well, go to the Brahmin Soumrou, tell him I sent you, and you will be well received."

And pushing his boat ashore with a vigorous effort, the ferryman landed our friends, and wished them good-day without demanding any payment; beggars being considered as sacred persons, have nothing to pay for services rendered them.

Nandapoor is a place which might serve as a type of the small towns of all the upper valley of the Ganges. Crowning a slight elevation formed by the *débris* of its ancient ruins, it is surrounded with a high mud wall, and has four entrance-gates, at which terminate as many roads, running

from a large square occupying the centre of the town. This square is the forum; around it are situated the houses of the *patel*, or mayor, and the leading men, members of the *pantchayet*, or parochial assembly; the *tannah*, or town-hall and lastly, the temple, which rears its lofty spire high above the heavy-sculptured porticoes. The houses, with tiled roofs, and walls of pise, ornamented with paintings, border the exquisitely clean, flagged streets. There is not a nation more scrupulously clean than the Hindoos, and the smallest hamlet of Oude, or of Hindoostan would certainly put to shame our good villagers, whose dwellings would rarely compare favourably with those of this reputed savage, or at least uncivilized people.

Mali, followed by his two acolytes, was received at the town-gates by cries of delight from a group of children, who soon flocked after the charmers.

"Ah, *Nâts! Nâts!*" cried the little urchins, clapping their hands. "Come and see the fine monkey," said one, at whom Hanouman, safely perched on Miana's shoulder, was making a grimace. "What are you going to show us?" said another to André; "do you charm serpents, or do you juggle with swords?"

The crowds in the streets parted to stare curiously at the *Nâts*, and were not slow in criticizing the strangers.

"Just look," said a venerable old dame, wearing a *Saree* of gold brocaded silk; "see what a majestic air the old man has with his long white beard and his red mantle. One would think he were the wise Vichamitra, the

architect and counsellor of the gods, whose portrait my husband had painted on the front of our house."

"Indeed!" remarked her neighbour; "what do you say to the two lads with him? The one is as fair and well-formed as Krichna himself; the other, with his dark eyes and bronzed face and the monkey on his shoulder, resembles the divine companion of Rama."

"I believe I have seen that old man before," added a third. "Two years ago, my husband, who is a coppersmith, having by mistake drunk some water which a pariah had touched, was obliged to go and purify himself in the waters of the Betwa, to wash away the stain. I accompanied him, and I am sure I saw the eldest of those three making his serpents dance before the golden statue of the Good Goddess."

The charmers, wholly indifferent to these remarks, continued their way towards the place where the *mêla* was to be held, followed all the time by the crowd of urchins, which kept increasing, until a tall man, armed with a short pike, came from among the people and advanced towards the strangers. Directly they saw him the troop of boys dispersed in all directions, and the man bowing to Mali, said,—

"Ram-ram, my father. I am the *kotwal*" (the apparitor) "of the community. It is my business to find shelter for strangers, and give them water. Follow me with your companions, and I will take you out of this crowd, for you seem to need rest."

"Thanks, *kotwaldji*," replied Mali. "I am come to

Nandapoor with my son and servant to take part in the *mêla*, and I wish to speak to the Brahmin Soumrou."

"Be it as you wish," said the apparitor. "There is the house of the venerable Soumrou quite near us on the square. I saw him come down the steps from the temple a few minutes ago, so he is most likely at home now. I will take you to him, and announce you."

The three friends followed their guide and stopped in front of the house of the Brahmin, who, when informed of their presence by the *kotwal*, soon appeared. He was a short, stout man, but very dignified; his face and skull were well shaven; over his spotless white garments hung his only ornament—a triple cord of bluish colour, emblematical of his high office. On seeing him, the three travellers put down their baskets and prostrated themselves before him.

"Hail, strangers!" said the Brahmin kindly. "Arise, and be welcome. This evening the people gather before the altar of red Kali, the wife of Siva. One of you, the youngest perhaps, can lend me his services in the solemnity. Till then the porticoes of the temple will serve you as shelter, and the *kâmdar*" (steward) "will bring you some food from the offerings. Go;" and without awaiting a reply, this majestic personage turned slowly away and re-entered his house.

Still conducted by the apparitor, the travellers went towards the temple, where, according to the Brahmin's command, they were soon installed in one of the rooms looking on to the sanctuary.

André could not help shuddering as he walked under the stone vaults sculptured with hideously grinning monsters. But shaking off this first impression, he curiously noted the mysteries forbidden to the eye of the infidel. The room where they were lodged looked, as we have said, on to the sanctuary itself. To tell the truth, it was but an immense stone building; overlooking the court were balconies where the higher classes sat to watch the solemnities. Through the wide opening communicating with the temple, could be seen the immense stone altar on which was throned the statue of the hideous Kali, the basest personification of idolatry that ever man invented. With threatening, scowling face, brow decked with a crown of human skulls, the idol brandished its ten arms, each holding a terrible weapon or some repulsive symbol. Its feet rested on a marble lion. The altar, the pavement, and the columns were painted dark-red, intended to imitate the colour of blood.

"What!" exclaimed André, all at once, turning to the old charmer, "is it before this horrible idol that all the people are coming to worship?"

"Yes, indeed, my lord," replied Mali; "it is Kali, the powerful goddess; it is she who, according to our belief, disposes of the lives of all human beings."

"Yes, I know," continued the young man; "Kali personifies terror. This goddess must have blood, and lately blood has flowed in torrents round her altars. Did not the Thugs formerly make most frightful sacrifices in her honour? and at the present time Nana Sahib is slaying

thousands of innocent victims to gain the favour of the terrible Dourga. And you, Mali, a just, tender-hearted, generous man, can you accept this impious worship which would make the Divine Creator lower than the beast? you who have saved the innocent, will you prostrate yourself before this monster, and do you expect me to lend my aid in its glorification? No, no; never!"

"Alas! my lord," said Mali gently, "do not speak so loudly. These walls themselves, could they hear, would crumble down and crush you. This is the worship of our fathers; unable to dispute it, I accept it such as it is. I hate bloodshed and murder, and in that I follow the law of the Védas and Pouranas. But these books teach me also that above these gods whom you abhor, there is a spirit, a Being all-powerful, eternal, and uncreated,—who is all goodness and all gentleness. And since the Hindoos have raised no altar to Him, Him alone I adore, in that sky which He has gemmed with stars, in those mountains which He has uplifted, in those mighty flowing rivers; in a word, in all nature so great and beautiful. I do what is right without murmuring, without complaining of the errors of mankind whom you first taught me to love and pardon. As to the honours to be rendered to Kali, I can understand how repulsive they must be to you, but the high-priest has spoken; remember that in obeying his orders, you make a step towards the rescue of your sister and father."

"You are always right," said André impetuously. "I will charm, I will dance, I will do anything you wish, if that can save those who are dearer to me than life."

As the high-priest had said, the travellers received a copious supply of rice and cakes. Then towards evening the Brahmin Soumrou came to explain to Mali the part which he was to play with the help of his companions. André's appearance seemed to strike him forcibly.

"Who is this youth you have with you?" said he to the old man.

"He who stands near you," humbly replied the charmer, "is my son, Andhra. The other is my servant, Miana."

"Then I must really congratulate you on having such a handsome son," continued Soumrou; "to look at him, one would take him for a prince rather than a *Nât*. But I know you sorcerers think little of stealing other people's children, and I suspect that youth has very little *Nât* blood in his veins."

Mali raised his hands in sign of protest, and the two lads merely smiled. When the priest had gone, Miana capered about in high delight, exclaiming: "Now we are saved. If the great Soumrou, the infallible oracle, has not been able to distinguish a European in our friend Andhra, no one else will discover him."

When night had fallen, the immense drums placed under the porch of the temple were beaten, and the large hall of the *tchaori* was quickly thronged.

The Brahmin temples are divided into two distinct parts. The first, the *tchaori*, is a pavilion, the heavy stone roof of which is simply supported by columns allowing the air and light to circulate freely; it is here the faithful take their places. The second, of no less dimensions, the *mandil*, is a massive building crowned with a lofty stone

spire; its only visible opening looks on to the *tchaori*. This is the sanctuary.

When the people were all gathered in the hall of the *tchaori*, the doors of the sanctuary opened and the sacred idol was displayed to the eyes of the faithful, brilliantly illuminated, decked with garlands of flowers, and apparently waving its numerous arms.

This apparition was received with enthusiastic cries on the part of the assembly, who, provided with flowers, covered the idol with a shower of sweet-scented projectiles. Then the cymbals sounded, and the crowd began to shriek and howl. Suddenly, on the daïs in front of the altar, appeared a young man dressed like a god. He wore a golden tiara on his brow, the flowing bands of which mingled with his hair. Innumerable gold bracelets and pearl necklaces enhanced the elegance of his almost naked body, the whiteness of which contrasted vividly with the red drapery round his waist. In one hand he held a long golden wand; in the other, a short ivory flute.

With impassive countenance and gestures as stiff as those of the idol, the young man extended his wand toward the fascinated crowd, whilst a murmur of admiration ran through their ranks. Then turning towards Kali, André struck the idol with perhaps too great a zest. Immediately, as though the goddess felt herself insulted, all her arms seemed to move, and from each out came a long serpent and glided to the ground. The young man was soon surrounded by a threatening circle; then with his flute he began to charm his assailants, who danced before

the altar, keeping time to the music. Taking the largest of the reptiles, an enormous python three yards long, he raised it in the air, and coiled it round the idol's n eck.

The enthusiasm of the crowd was now indescribable; on all sides rose cries of "Ouah! ouah! chavach! chavach!" (It is an avatar! it is Krichna himself!) On turning round, André again waved his golden sceptre over the assembly with an imperious gesture, and all heads were bowed low; before they raised them the demi-god had disappeared.

When André returned to the room where the Brahmins were sitting, he was received with marks of the liveliest admiration. The high-priest, Soumrou, rose, and said to him,—

"Young Andhra, the hand of Mahadeo must needs have rested on thy brow, for never could simple *Nât* thus have electrified our faithful. Stay with us henceforth. After having purified thyself in the waters of the Triveni, I will give thee a sacred charge, and thou shalt spend an honoured life in this temple."

"Know you not, my lord, that these honours are not destined for me?" replied André; "I am but an unclean *Nât;* and besides, have not the Pouranas said, 'The Son is but the first servant of his father'? My father, Mali, is old If I leave him, who will care for him? My duty is to follow him, as of old the dog followed the glorious Pandous even to Hades."

The Brahmins applauded the young man's words; then Soumrou, turning towards Mali, said to him,—

"The gods have given thee a treasure of which I cannot

Taking an enormous python, he raised it in the air.

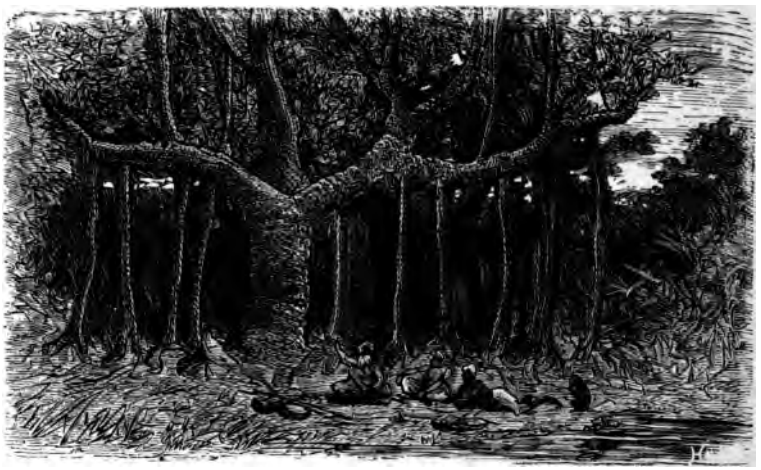
Page 106.

rob thee. Go thy way. Here are two gold rupees which the Good Goddess herself charged me to give thee. As to thee, Andhra, take this copper ring, on which is engraven a trident; and if ever thou shouldst want assistance or refuge, fearlessly enter the temples of Kali, where thou wilt be in safety.

The high-priest waved his hand to the three companions, who now left the temple, for the mysteries which were to take up the whole night could not be accomplished in their presence.

"We will start at daybreak," said Mali; "so let us make haste and get a little rest away from this noisy crowd." Then speaking to Andhra, he said,—

"Thou hast gained a most important victory. Henceforth the ring from Soumrou will protect and shelter thee from all suspicion."



The place which Mali chose.

CHAPTER X.

THE HIMALAYAN TÉRAÏ.

THE Téraï is an unique region of the world. The traveller who has journeyed through the virgin forests of the Amazon, or who, hatchet in hand, has cleft a path through the savannahs of Guiana or the wilds of the Gaboon, has seen nothing to be compared to the luxuriant grandeur of the terrible Himalayan marshes. From the shores of the Sutledj to the Brahmapootra, it forms an uninterrupted line five hundred miles in length, separating the fertile plains of the Ganges from the first outlying spur of the Himalayas.

Protected from the north wind by this gigantic wall, which rears itself upward to an altitude of more than eight thousand yards, the soil of the Téraï boils, one may say, beneath the fierce rays of the meridian sun. It would be but a parched desert, did not the mountain deluge it with the torrents of water flowing unceasingly from its glaciers; it is therefore a marsh, but a marsh covered with the most beautiful forest in the world. The soil heated and moistened yields a vegetation, the exuberance of which gives some idea of the flora which covered the globe before the creation of man, when this thin terrestrial crust, scarcely covering the burning lava, received the full force of the cataracts of the sky, as yet unconfined to the bed of the sea. Deep in the heart of the Himalayan marsh gigantic trees tower upwards with arching boughs, higher than the boldest builder of our basilicas ever dreamed of reaching. Then, as though the ground were not enough for them, innumerable filaments, adventive roots, drop from the branches and swing to and fro in the breeze, till at last they reach the soil, where they become implanted, and, in their turn, shoot up in gigantic columns, thin and straight, supporting the arches of the mother vault. A tangled mass of creepers entwine the trunks, and adorn this arborescent architecture, whilst myriads of orchids of dazzling corolla, gem the columns and stems. At the foot of these giant trees are tufted clumps of bamboo, the stems of which, a foot thick at their base, grow gradually thinner and curve out like jets of fireworks, to a height of more than a hundred feet. Lastly, all over the marshes in the beds of the muddy

streams, the sacred lotus, with flesh-coloured petals, spreads out its broad leaves; the golden iris bristles, with its sword-blades, and myriads of flowers hang in clusters over the crumbling banks.

In these thickets, impenetrable to man, is an animal life no less powerful. The enormous royal tiger, the leopard, and the panther here dispute for the antelope and deer, without daring to attack the taciturn primitive bull or the wild boar. Elephants wander about in troops, making paths through the clumps of bamboo, and pass their days in indolent enjoyment, plunged in the tepid waters, which are abandoned to them by the scared crocodile with its thousand teeth, and the alligator of triangular jaw. In the profoundest depths of the forest, the stupid rhinoceros burrows its lair. The branches are thronged with quadrumanes, black-faced langours, red-pouched monkeys, baboons, and birds with golden and silver plumage flash through the dark foliage, which the quaker peacocks, screeching paroquets, and noisy parrots fill with their deafening discord. Among the mossy trunks glide the terrible python, the black cobra, and a hundred kinds of venomous reptiles. Lastly, swarming by thousands, in the boiling marsh, are scorpions, centipedes, scolopendra, and monstrous spiders.

But tigers, rhinoceroses, boas, and scorpions, are but paltry enemies compared to that which awaits man in the Himalayan Téraï. Much more terrible still is the malaria. Beneath the dark vault of forest, where the air can scarcely circulate, the heavy atmosphere, charged with vapours in

which the thermometer mounts to 160°, is saturated with poisons distilled from the venomous plants so numerous in these parts. This atmosphere is deadly to an unacclimatized European; and he need not expose himself to it for long months,—a few hours suffice for him to feel its terrible effects. The Hindoo, or one born in India, can resist it longer, but even he is forced to yield.

In vain man would contend, tempted by the promises of the fruitful soil: he has vanquished wild beasts, he has expelled reptiles, has raised towns and palaces there where stood the giants of the forest; but, in its turn, the pestilential malaria has vanquished him—has driven him away; and at the present time abandoned cities and deserted palaces stand alone in the midst of the again freed forests, bearing witness of these fruitless struggles. However, the Téraï has its human inhabitants. These are the Métchis, —miserable savages, pariahs of humanity, half wild beasts, —who wander about naked in the midst of these solitudes, waging perpetual war with man and beast.

Such was the region that Mali had resolved to cross with his young companions; such were the numerous formidable enemies he feared not to confront.

However, when after a three days' march from Nandapoor, the fugitives reached the border of the black forest, above which gleamed the white summits of the Himalayas, the old charmer thought it his duty to forewarn André. He pictured to him all the dangers which we have just enumerated, and finished by saying that there was yet time to draw back.

"Is there indeed no other road that we can take?" asked the young man.

"No, my lord," replied Mali. "I have said so before, and the information I gathered at Nandapoor confirmed my words. To the east, the south, and the west, our enemies are masters; the north alone remains, and to the north lies the Téraï. However, your disguise is so complete, that should you think it advisable, we can remain in this country in safety, and await the end of the horrible mutiny."

"Then, if I understand rightly, it is you who dread the Téraï?" said André, and his voice quivered as he spoke.

"By no means," replied the old man. "Mali says what he means, and the Téraï alarms him no more than it does Miana. This is not the first time we have been this way together; and, even though we did dread it, what would we not face to save you?"

"Is it I, then? I who would draw back?" exclaimed the young man. "From here I can see the summits at the foot of which I shall recover my liberty, where I can work to save my dear ones! and think you I am to be cowed by any danger, real or imaginary, which you are ready to confront out of pure devotion to myself? Come, Mali, lead the way, and you shall see whether a Frenchman is more frightened of tigers than a Hindoo!"

Mali warmly grasped the young man's hand, and smiled. He well knew that André would not draw back, and his successive doubts were but the tactics by which he now hoped to keep up the young man's sanguine spirits.

A few hours later they were making their way under the dense vaults of foliage, in Indian file, along a narrow elephant track.

André, far from showing any alarm, went into raptures over the marvellous vegetation; and as henceforth they had nothing to fear from indiscreet ears, Miana and he discoursed without restraint on the beauties around them.

"That is nothing!" cried Miana, on seeing André admire a gigantic tree, multiplying itself till its thousand arched buttresses looked like a Gothic cathedral. "When we come to my country I will show you trees which will make these look like matches."

"Thou art a good patriot, which is about all thy words prove," said André, smiling. "Trees larger than these would make a forest of themselves. But are we going into thy country?"

"Certainly," replied Miana. "At least, it is a country which I may call mine. I don't know where I was born. All I know is that my father was a *Nât* and a sword juggler. Although I was very young at the time, I can remember having seen him in the streets of towns, making swords fly round him. Our home, a poor hut, was near the gates of Mussourie. We scarcely ever stayed there, but spent our time on the roads, going from one fair to another. We travelled all together, my father, mother, and two sisters older than myself. Whilst my father juggled, my mother played the tam-tam and my sisters danced; they had given me a monkey, and my artless performances were highly

appreciated by the spectators. One day we set out for the fair at Hardwar. You know, it is the finest in the world. The Ganges, which issues from the mountains at this spot, has marvellous virtues: its waters cleanse the body and soul from all impurities. That year more than two hundred thousand pilgrims were gathered at Hardwar. You cannot imagine what a sight it was, this crowd heaped together in the narrow valley of the river! The people were almost walking on the top of each other. However, my father was well satisfied, for charitable people were not wanting, and he was doing a good trade. All at once it was rumoured that the *pêtmadi*, which you call the cholera, had broken out. In a few days one half of the pilgrims were attacked; and thus, one after another, I saw all my relations perish."

"Yes," said Mali, "it was frightful. It was in 1848. A hundred thousand persons died at Hardwar alone; then the scourge spread over the whole of India, and in a few months made three million victims."

"Yes," added André, "my poor father has even told me that the plague extended to Europe, where it made great ravages."

"There I was left alone," continued Miana, "a poor child of six years old. And in the general alarm no one paid any attention to me. I should certainly have died of want and fear had not a man, seeing me wandering alone in the camp, questioned me. I told him my sad story. He took me by the hand, and led me away with him; since then he has always cared for me. It was Mali."

"Our good Mali!" exclaimed André, pressing the old man's hand. "You were not telling the truth then, when you told us at Gandapoor that you had never done a good action in your life."

"My sons," said the old charmer, visibly affected, and in order to avoid the young man's praises, "I have an important piece of advice to give you. If either of you should lose your way, which would not be impossible, in this dark forest, remember that to get out of this place, you must keep in a north-westerly direction, and as you know pretty well how to make out your whereabouts both by day and night, that will be sufficient guide. Each one carries his share of provisions, thus we can make our minds easy on that point."

It was hard work for the travellers, and they made but slow progress. After having followed a path for some time they would come across an impassable barrier, which obliged them to turn back and search for an outlet in the direction they wished to go. At other times they sank in mud up to their knees, and André shuddered as he felt thousands of repulsive insects swarming around him.

An hour before sunset Mali gave the signal to halt.

"We must resign ourselves," said he, "to travelling only in the heat of the day. Besides having less to fear at this time from the attacks of wild beasts, it would be impossible for us to take a step in this thicket after dark. Lastly we must always find a high tree in which we can pass the night. This will protect us from the bite of

reptiles, but will not shield us from panthers, who would soon dislodge us from a place of refuge, however high it might be. It will therefore be necessary to light a large fire and keep it burning all night to scare wild beasts away."

The place which Mali had chosen combined all these conditions. The tree, a gigantic ancient fig-tree, stood on the side of a clearing of considerable extent, traversed by a clear brook. André and Miana lighted a fire and collected an ample supply of dry wood for the night. Then having cooked and partaken of their frugal meal, the fugitives climbed up into the tree and comfortably installed themselves at the point of intersection of its arched buttresses. The sun had scarcely disappeared below the horizon when all these preparations were completed.

Instantly the forest was plunged in darkness, and the noisy altercations of paroquets were suddenly silenced.

The first few hours were peaceful enough. The fire burnt brightly and the forest was silent. All at once from the depths of the darkness rose a terrible roar, which was immediately answered from all sides by similar sounds. André, alarmed, sat up and listened to the infernal concert, in which the peacocks, also startled from their slumbers, joined their terrified screeches.

"Those are my lords the tigers on their hunting excursions," said Miana, who in his turn had been aroused by the noise. "They have, no doubt, arranged together to attack some large prey, and after having formed their

line of investment, they are signalling to each other to fall upon their victim."

"Do tigers hunt in bands?" asked André; "I thought that they were of solitary habits."

"Usually," replied Miana, "the tiger hunts alone, at most with his own family; but when from one cause or another game is scarce, the famished tigers unite to attack some formidable prey which they could not manage alone."

"It is in this way," added Mali, "that tigers, who are the most cowardly creatures, succeed in conquering elephants, and even rhinoceroses."

In fact they could hear the roars drawing closer. Ere long the travellers were able to make out that the struggle was taking place; the roars were followed by cries of rage, above which rose a noise like a trumpet blast.

"It is an elephant," exclaimed Miana, "it is an elephant which has wandered from its troop, and been surprised by the tigers!"

Suddenly there was an uproar as of trees being broken and overturned, the earth seemed to tremble as though beneath the weight of a charge of cavalry, and the fugitives saw an enormous elephant cross the clearing, surrounded by ten tigers, some clinging to its back and others keeping alongside. Dashing forward at a headlong pace, trampling down bamboos and creepers beneath its weight, the enormous animal passed like lightning before the fire which burned at the foot of the tree, and which for a moment lighted up this strange scene; then it disappeared

in the darkness, dragging after it the pack of ravenous tigers. For some time our friends listened breathlessly to the noise of its flight; soon the roars were redoubled, the ground shook beneath the fall of a heavy body; the vanquished elephant had just succumbed, and already they could hear the wild beasts disputing their prey.

"What a frightful scene!" exclaimed André, "poor elephant!"

"Yes, poor elephant!" repeated Mali; "but thanks to him, we shall perhaps have a quiet night. There is a feast ready spread; the tigers and their friends will have enough to fight for to-night without troubling themselves about us. Only, Miana, as thou art a light sleeper, do not forget our fire; if it goes out we are lost."

The large wood fire was burning brightly, and its flames leapt up merrily. Thus nothing was to be feared in this respect, and the travellers were soon asleep again.

We will not say that André slept as soundly as though he were in his own comfortable bedroom at Gandapoor. Notwithstanding the fatigue which weighed down his eyelids, the terrible spectacle he had just witnessed had so unnerved him that he started up every minute and listened to the frightful noises which filled the forest.

The growls of the tigers devouring the elephant could be heard, and on every side suspicious creakings reached his ears. From time to time a deer or a boar would dart through the lighted clearing like an arrow, soon followed by a feline form bounding after it in hot pursuit.

He threw it with force and precision.

At each new alarm André cast an anxious look at the fire; then reassured by its leaping flames, he again fell asleep. Once, however, he thought he heard a low miauling quite close to him. He instinctively raised himself. All was dark round the tree, and the dying fire was nothing but red embers. Seized with fear, the young man remained motionless for a moment, peering down into the underwood to try and discover the enemy. There, in fact, his eyes met two round shining pupils, which, gleaming a few feet in the shade behind the embers, seemed to transfix him.

"Miana! Miana!" said André in a trembling voice, "the fire is out, and there is a tiger down there!"

The young Hindoo, without replying, rose, and clinging to one of the fig-tree's buttresses, let himself glide to the ground. Advancing cautiously towards the embers, he took from it a red-hot brand, and balancing it for a second in the air, threw it with force and precision between the glaring eyes of the invisible enemy. The creature gave a howl of pain, and noisily decamped into the brushwood.

"That will teach you not to come and disturb us," cried Miana, laughing. Then, having made up the fire, he quickly regained his perch. "It was only a panther," said he to André. "Tigers' eyes at night have a reddish glare, whilst those of the panther gleam like opals set in gold. But you did well to warn me, for she would have waited patiently until the fire was quite out, and then come to

look for one of us in the tree. In that case my affairs would have been quickly settled."

"Why should she take you rather than one of us?" asked André.

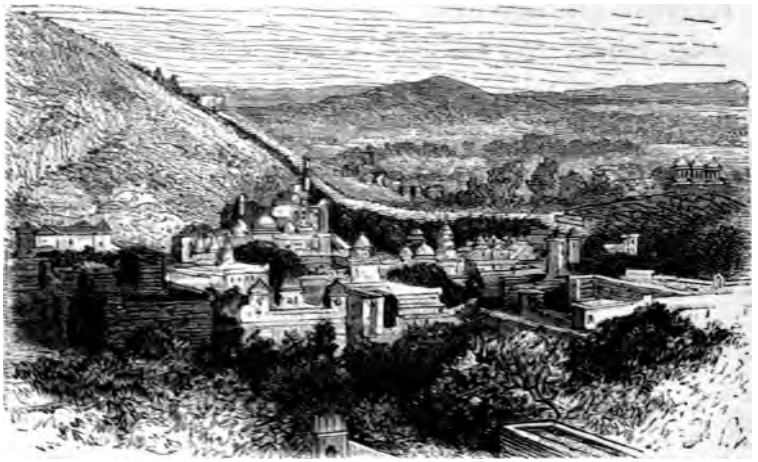
"First of all, she would not have chosen you," said Miana, laughing. "You know that our tigers do not like white flesh; and between old Mali and myself, I don't think she would have hesitated."

Miana was right to a certain point. Numerous observations have proved that out of a group of Europeans and Hindoos, the tiger will always choose his victim from among the Asiatics. Nevertheless, in lack of a Hindoo, he does not disdain a European.

This first night seemed interminable to poor André, who, after this alarm, could get no more sleep. At last the shades of night slowly dispersed, and the pale light of early dawn broke through the forest. Silence, absolute silence, succeeded the frightful uproar of the night, and reigned for an hour. The wild beasts were stealthily regaining their dens. Then, when the last had disappeared, and the rosy light of sunrise tinged the tree tops, the great langour monkeys uttered their prolonged "hou! hou!" and all the peaceable hosts of the forest answering the cry, saluted the return of day with a thousand cries.

Soon the peacocks, having shaken out their plumage on the topmost branches of the trees, and exercised their unmusical voices, wheeled down in flashing circles, and settled on the ground of the clearing, which they covered

with their gay-coloured robes. Silver pheasants, jungle-cocks with red feathers, and black pelicans, came to drink at the brook. Any one coming up at this moment, and contemplating this charming and peaceful spectacle, could never have believed that the clearing was but an hour previously the theatre of such murderous dramas.



"At their feet lay the beautiful valley of Amba."

CHAPTER XI.

A DEAD CITY.

As soon as the sun was visible above the horizon, the fugitives came down from their tree, and after partaking of a frugal meal, they again started on their journey. Mali and Miana, accustomed to the nocturnal disturbances, had made good use of their night's rest; André, on the contrary, had scarcely closed his eyes, and was literally worn out with fatigue.

Mali looked compassionately at the young man, but it was useless to think of making another halt; the provisions were rationed out, and any delay might have a

fatal consequence. If the fugitives were not out of the Téraï in three weeks, they would have no other resource than wild fruit, which is sometimes very scarce. Thus they walked bravely onward through the brushwood for several hours, keeping strictly in a north-westerly direction, when suddenly there was a great gleam of light, as though the forest had all at once come to an end.

In truth, a few steps brought them to the outskirt of the wood, and they found themselves on the banks of a beautiful lake encircled with hills of considable elevation.

The lake was, in fact, an immense reservoir made by the hand of man, for at the opening of the valley could be seen the straight line of a long dyke, over which its waters fell noisily in a wide sheet. Lastly the lake was spanned at its narrowest part by a beautiful marble causeway.

This was not the only proof of his presence which man had left behind him. On all sides, even on the banks of the lake, were elegant palaces, with crumbling terraces and marble cupolas dipping their long rows of delicately-sculptured galleries in the water. In the centre of the reservoir rose a vast edifice, with high towers and dome, surmounted with a golden trident which glittered in the sunlight. The water of the lake, rising above its primitive level, had half submerged the lower stories of these buildings, over which the luxuriant tropical vegetation had cast a verdant mantle. Curtains of flowering creepers hung between the arcades, and trees planted on the terraces made hanging gardens. Lastly thousands of aquatic birds,—white pelicans pluming their long wings, and pink flamin-

goes keeping guard on the porticos, gave animation to the surface of the lake and the long line of buildings.

All this clearly reflected in the limpid, shadowy mirror, formed so entrancing and fairy-like a spectacle, that one would have said these enchanted or ill-fated cities were none other than those discovered by the calenders in "A Thousand and One Nights," when on their strange excursions.

Our travellers greeted this strangely beautiful spectacle with cries of admiration, and then stood silent and motionless, as though fearing they were the plaything of some deceptive mirage.

"If I mistake not," said Mali all at once, "this reservoir is none other than the Jaya Talao, the lake of Victory; in this case we are drawing near the sacred city of Amba, which must lie hidden among those hills."

"A city!" exclaimed André; "what a blessing! I shall be able to sleep undisturbed to-night."

"Yes," continued Mali, "I trust that the sacred city may be able to offer us a night's shelter, though it has no more inhabitants than those deserted palaces you see there. I have often heard speak of the wonders of Amba, and of its Jaya Talao, but never has chance led me hither before. We might have passed within a mile of it without the least idea of its proximity."

"What!" exclaimed Miana, "is it all deserted for ever? Do not those fine palaces belong to any one?"

"Since the last Brahmin cast the ashes of the last king of Amba in this lake, and pronounced a curse on any one who should dare to approach this place, the whole city has

been given up to Siva. And yet it is reported that countless treasures are left exposed there."

"You said just now that this city was sacred," interrupted André.

"Yes, indeed, formerly Amba was one of the brightest jewels in the crown of India. A brave king, Lall Singh, the Red Lion, driven from his country by his allied enemies, took refuge with his people in the dark Téraï. Having now no other country, they disputed the forest with tigers and serpents, and ere long from the hands of these intrepid men rose a wonderful town. Fields covered with rich harvests stretched far and wide, and the power and wealth of the Red Lion became immense. At the approach to the capital was a dark unhealthy valley, which seemed to resist all encroachment. A river, half-choaked by trunks of trees, traversed it, and poisoned the atmosphere with its deadly miasma. Taking in hand the task which none of his subjects could accomplish, the Red Lion, now an old man, cut down forests, cast the dyke you see there across the river, and made this reservoir, which he called Victory Lake, because he had conquered rebellious nature by his perseverance. Then on an island of the lake he built a magnificent palace, as these ruins testify, where he lived to the end of his days. In the centre of the great hall of the Durbars, occupying the ground-floor of the palace, he had a black marble watermark placed. Before his death, the old king commanded his successor and the nobles of his court to assemble in the hall, and pointing to the pedestal, scarcely three feet high, he said, 'When the waters of the

lake shall have risen above that stone, then the kingdom of Amba will cease to exist.

"Lall Singh was succeeded by several kings, who continued the work of the founder; the land was cultivated, and the kingdom of Amba rapidly increased. But after them came princes, who, seeing the country so beautiful, forgot all the labours of their ancestors. Instead of cutting down forests and making dykes, they built themselves marvellous palaces, resplendent with gold and precious stones. The people, also, enervated by their prosperity, forgot the work of their forefathers, and thought only of erecting showy houses. And whilst the palaces were being raised, the bazaars filled with gold and silk, the forest was advancing, the canals becoming obstructed, and the atmosphere again growing poisonous. After some years the evil had increased to such an extent that the forest reached the ramparts of the city, and children in their cradles were carried off by the fever. Soon it was discovered that the magical lake, the Jaya Talao, was rising; already its waters had reached the ground-floor of the hall of the Durbars, and were bathing the foot of the pedestal. The waters continued to rise, and the inhabitants, alarmed by the prophecy, fled. At last a day came when only the top of the pedestal was to be seen. The last king, Goulab Singh, the Lion of the Roses, was dying of fever, after a licentious life. According to custom, he was carried to the palace of the old Red Lion, already half submerged, and there he breathed his last. His body was burnt with great pomp on the upper terrace, and his relations were disputing over his still warm

ashes as to who should succeed to the throne, when an unknown Brahmin arrived, and cried in a voice of thunder, 'The prophecy of Lall Singh is accomplished. The waters of the lake have covered the pedestal. The kingdom of Amba is no more!' All the people stood motionless and stupefied. 'Fools,' continued the Brahmin, 'to dispute for that which you have not known how to keep! This lake, conquered after so much sacrifice, was but the emblem of the great works you should have performed. Created by persevering labour, your prosperity was maintained by labour, now it is swallowed up by your indolence, as the water-mark has been by the waters which your care might have retained within their bed. Fly! Let this place be given back to nature, and freed from your corruptions.' Then taking the urn containing the ashes of Goulab Singh, he flung it into the lake, crying, 'Anathema! Anathema!' The crowd, filled with consternation and bewilderment, fled from the condemned city, never more to return. Since then, says the legend, no human being has ever set foot on the soil of Amba. But," added Mali, "as our cause is just, and Almighty Siva cannot but protect us, we will fearlessly enter the sacred city, and crave a shelter for the night."

So the fugitives stepped boldly on to the causeway, which, according to the legend, led to the town. This causeway, a a hundred feet in width, formed of enormous blocks of marble polished by the wear of centuries, appeared to be a cyclopean work.

André, who was walking by the edge in order to get a

better view of the submerged palaces, suddenly uttered a cry of fright, and sprang back. At the same instant an enormous jaw armed with pointed teeth appeared above the side of the causeway, quickly followed by the long greenish scaly body of an alligator. But the monster had reckoned without his host, for scarcely was he out of the water when a vigorous blow on his muzzle, dealt by Miana, quickly sent him back.

"Upon my word!" cried the young Hindoo; "if that is not going rather too far. Catch us in your own element if you can, but don't think you are going to get us on our own ground! Ah, ah! what an absurd idea!"

André's cry and Miana's exclamations seemed to have aroused all the monsters in the lake from their torpor. Soon the edge of the causeway was lined with menacing jaws. It looked as though the genius of the town had sent his dragons to annihilate these daring intruders.

At first it was great fun for Miana and André, who had now joined the young Hindoo. Down came their staffs with a loud crack on each muzzle as it made its appearance. But soon the aggressors became so numerous, that even the impassive Mali was obliged to take part in the battle.

Indeed, the situation of affairs was growing serious. The travellers had still a hundred yards to go, and already they were fighting, not for amusement, but for their lives. The crocodiles, excited by the scent of their prey, gradually lost their timidity. Some of them had raised themselves, and were closely pursuing the fugitives, who were now beset

A vigorous blow on his muzzle quickly sent him back.

Page 128.

on all sides. At this crisis the least false step would have been fatal; thus whilst he defended himself, Mali kept crying out, "Don't be afraid, my sons, these vermin are great cowards. But above all things, do not run; draw back slowly, and be very careful of these slippery stones."

Thus beating a retreat, the travellers had reached the opposite bank before the sheepish-looking crocodiles had dared to make a direct attack on them. They were congratulating themselves on having escaped their terrible enemies when André discovered that in the excitement of the struggle he had let his toumril, the charmer's flute, fall. The loss was serious and irreparable, and the young man was bewailing his misfortune when, on looking back along the causeway, he saw the instrument lying about twenty feet from him. The crocodiles were now thickly bordering the causeway, and formed a cordon of jaws it would have been foolhardy to confront. The fugitives were greatly perplexed, for how could the precious instrument possibly be recovered? Miana offered to go and get it; but Mali rebuked him sharply for his temerity.

"Stay!" cried the young Hindoo all at once; "I have a plan." Then taking his monkey, who was perched on his shoulder, in his arms, he said, pointing to the toumril, "Now, Hanouman, go and bring the toumril to your master." Hanouman looked not only at the toumril, but at the crocodiles, and the sight of these latter seemed to make him hesitate. But Miana insisted, and the docile creature gathering up his courage jumped to the ground and ran

to the causeway. The crocodiles on seeing him, eagerly awaited his approach. When within a foot of the monsters' jaws, the monkey made a bound, and passing over the wide-open mouths, he alighted safely on the other side. Whilst he was running to pick up the toumril, the crocodiles turned round tumultuously,—not a very easy feat for saurians, and made still more difficult by their numbers. Thus Hanouman had picked up the flute and again lept over them before they could resume their line of battle. It may well be imagined how the good monkey was petted and praised for his skilfulness and courage.

Leaving the banks of the lake, the travellers began to climb the hill in front of them. Here and there, through the thick carpet of verdure, the disjointed flagstones of the ancient road could be seen. Following this path they soon came to a gateway, the lofty arch of which was hidden among the foliage of the trees. This was the principal entrance to Amba; everything here was quite intact. One would have said that only yesterday the place was full of life and movement, so well had the solidity of the material resisted the invasion of vegetation.

After having invoked the protection of mighty Siva, the old charmer crossed the threshold of the condemned city with a firm step; his two companions followed with a vague feeling of terror.

On the other side the gateway, gigantic trees crowded together, entwining their enormous roots among the fragments of masonry, the sole remains of houses which had formerly existed. But after walking a short distance, the

travellers again found themselves under the open sky, and at their feet now lay the beautiful valley of Amba.

Picture to yourself a deep crater, the steep sides of which are covered with thick, dark underwood, in the centre a cone of verdure, serving as pedestal to a glittering marble palace, beside which the wonders of Grenada and Seville sink into the shade; around the cone a desolate silent city whose smallest houses are palaces, bathing their lofty *façades* in the dark waters of a lake. On the steep banks of the crater a high wall, whose battlements stand out clear against the deep blue sky, and encircling the city, seems to detach it from the rest of the world.

Such was the spectacle which offered itself to the eyes of the fugitives, who, motionless and silent, seemed to be wondering whether or no the heavy atmosphere of this enchanted forest were not this time fascinating their eyes by a dazzling mirage. The immense palace of the successors of the Red Lion seemed to strike them above all as a supernatural vision, with its domes covered with gold and blue enamel, its turrets of ivory-yellow marble, its walls suspending their gilded balconies over precipices: here, indeed, was the enchanted palace of the legends of Chehrarzad.

Following a path which rapidly wound into the valley, the travellers soon reached the Tâl Koutora, the ancient sacred pond of the city; small marble kiosks, sheltering four-faced idols, were grouped on the bank, and trees laden with fruit, the remains of ancient gardens, drooped their branches over the water.

Our friends stopped in the midst of this wild orchard to taste the fruit and quench their thirst with the water of the pond. Seated in one of the kiosks, they now gazed upon the city itself, the outlying houses of which could be seen at the further end of the sheet of water. The silence of death hovered over the valley. Not a living being could be seen, not a bird fluttered through the air, not a monster of the deep disturbed the calm surface of the water.

A feeling of mysterious dread crept over André, and he now almost regretted the gloomy forest. There, at least, if all was danger, all was life; whilst here death seemed to have struck every living being, and still threatened the daring invaders of its kingdom.

To these fears, shared by Miana and artlessly expressed to Mali, the old man replied, "He who walks uprightly before God need not tremble at imaginary dangers. If Amba and its inhabitants were cursed, it was because they had sinned; the malediction does not rest upon us, for our hearts are pure."

Continuing their walk they soon entered the streets of the deserted city. All around them now were lofty façades with sculptured arcades and monumental porticoes surmounted by antique escutcheons. The doorways, deprived in most cases of their doors, which had crumbled away with age, exposed to view immense rooms, in some of which were still traces of their ancient splendour. Here and there a long row of ruins, covered with a thick mantle of vegetation, marked the former site of bazaars, and the less substantial buildings of the poorer classes. Then again, in the midst

of the dark foliage of ancient mangoes, rose stately arcades, lofty sculptured frontals, and the long colonnades of imposing palaces. Nowhere has nature entwined herself so tenderly and gracefully with the works of man; left to herself she has covered bare walls with creepers and flowers, planted courtyards with shady gardens, and fastened her pipals and her cacti to the marble trellis-work of terraces. As they wended their way through the silent streets our travellers were touched with a feeling of tender melancholy, which bare, grim-looking ruins could scarcely inspire; here the sunlight, glancing through the trees, fell warmly and brightly on the picturesque medly of verdure and sculptured stone. By mysterious paths they came to small ponds surrounded with porticoes, and the waters of which reflected the lofty stone spires of magnificent temples.

These sacred edifices, built entirely of stone, had escaped the general ruin. Their flights of marble steps still bore witness of the numerous crowds who had trodden them, and on the unimpaired altars were throned the impassive idols before whom the devout had so often prostrated themselves. Some of the temples were profusely and sumptuously decorated, and gold and silver vases still shone in sculptured recesses. These riches would have been an easy prey for our travellers, but even André would have deemed it sacrilege to violate the mysterious sanctuaries.

Mali at first proposed that they should take up their quarters for the night in one of the temples, but André and Miana were longing to visit the fairy-like palace-royal, and he yielded to their entreaties.

"Very well," said he, "let us go to the palace. We shall perhaps lose precious time by so doing, but I shall not be sorry to see for myself whether the dwelling-place of the kings of Amba answers to the wonderful description of it in the legend."

We have said that this palace stood on the summit of a conical rock, right in the centre of the narrow valley. A flight of stone steps, hewn out of the rock, wound round the cone, and overhung the waters of the sacred pond. Several portals placed in *échelon* at certain distances, formerly prevented access to this path, but the doors had been left wide open, and nothing opposed the progress of our travellers.

They were drawing near the enclosure itself, the monumental arched gateway of which they could just see, when Miana suddenly exclaimed,—

"Look, look! the palace is inhabited."

And in fact, to the great terror of the daring visitors, numerous heads appeared above the battlements. Great excitement seemed to prevail among the defenders of the place, for they could be seen running from one side to the other as though taking up their posts of resistance, and already the terraces and windows of the palace were filled with people.

The travellers, alarmed by this unexpected apparition, were hurriedly beating a retreat, when all at once they heard a prolonged "Hou! Hou!" immediately repeated by a thousand hoarse voices, to which Hanouman, perched on his master's shoulder, replied in his turn with a similar cry.

"They are monkeys, they are langours," exclaimed Miana, "and here was I just beginning to think that we had to do with a legion of genii."

"It is quite likely," said Mali, "that it is a tribe of langours who have taken up their abode in the deserted palace. Nevertheless, we must not be too venturesome."

"Are these monkeys to be feared then?" asked André.

"No, my lord, they are quiet, inoffensive creatures; but when they are in large numbers they will offer fight to an enemy. You undoubtedly know that these monkeys are organized in a curious way. Grouped in tribes, they obey one chief—a king, in fact, who leads and directs them. When the place in which they have settled no longer furnishes them with sufficient sustenance, they emigrate in tribes, and never hesitate to offer battle to any weaker band whose settlement they may wish for. It is very probable that the tribe you see yonder has occupied the palace ever since mankind abandoned it, for the ancient royal gardens must still yield fruit enough for them; and besides that, monkeys like living in abandoned human habitations. In any case, I think we had better give up our visit to the palace. I doubt whether those langours would allow us to enter."

"Do you really think so, Mali?" said André, who seemed greatly vexed at this decision.

"I do indeed," replied the charmer.

"Happy thought!" exclaimed Miana, who for some moments had stood lost in meditation. "Although I know how to train monkeys, I doubt whether those up there would be very quick pupils. But Hanouman understands

what I say to him; you had a good instance of that this morning. Well, I am going to send him all alone to make acquaintance with the langours; he will explain to them that we are honest folk, and that we wish them no harm, and then they will let us pass. What say you to that?"

"It is all very ingenious," said Mali, "but I doubt whether Hanouman will be able to explain our good intentions quite so easily."

"I don't pretend to know what he will say to his relations," said Miana, a little huffed by this want of credulity, "but I am certain he will make himself understood."

"Very well, try," said the old man; "we shall see."

Without further parley Miana made Hanouman sit down in front of him, and looking him steadily in the face he began to talk to him, in an undertone. Then, suddenly getting up, he pointed to his two friends and then to the monkeys on the wall, and clapping his hands he cried, "Go!" Hanouman stood upright for a moment, and looked at Mali and André with his good intelligent eyes, as though to reproach them for their want of confidence; then without the slightest hesitation, he bounded off towards the palace gate.

At sight of this ambassador the monkeys perched themselves inquisitively on the parapets, then leaving their posts of observation they flocked towards the gates, where Hanouman was received by a numerous crowd. From where they stood to await the issue of the conference the travellers could hear a babel of cries and chattering such as a human crowd would have uttered. Soon all the monkeys,

Hanouman included, disappeared under the archway, and the entrance was left deserted.

Some minutes passed, and Miana was already beginning to grow uneasy as to the fate of his favourite, when again there was a great noise, and the crowd of monkeys reappeared, escorting Hanouman, who set out running toward his master accompanied by two large monkeys, but growing timid, they left him half-way.

On his return Hanouman contented himself with capering about in a highly delighted manner, which Miana at once interpreted thus : " We may pass."

Mali smiled at his young friend's confidence, and merely said, " Come along, then ; but promise me to be prudent." Preceded by Hanouman, the three travellers again went towards the palace. The little band passed under the mysterious portico and found themselves in a courtyard of wonderful aspect and dimensions. On three sides extended long, regular façades of heavy, severe architecture, whilst the fourth was shut in by buildings of incomparable beauty. Two of these edifices are among the most sumptuous in the whole world,—the one is a hall formed by a hundred columns of jasper supporting a gilded ceiling ; the other is a portico in mosaic, which bears the name of the Wonderful Gate. An immense flight of steps leads up from the first court to the terrace. Our travellers ascended these steps, still guided by Hanouman, and followed by the chattering crowd. On reaching the court they at once perceived an old monkey, white with age, who was perched on the edge of one of the pavilions, and surrounded by

several large monkeys. Recognizing in this person the chief of the tribe, Mali bowed respectfully to him, and said,—

"O divine successor of the immortal companion of Rama, I prostrate myself before thee. Led by Hanouman we have dared to enter thy dread abode. But think not that we have any intention of laying hands on the treasures which Siva has committed to thy keeping. These young people, urged by curiosity, desire to look upon all these wonders. Grant them this favour, and allow us to pass the night under thy protection."

The old king looked attentively at Mali, and his companions, without apparently understanding a word of this fine speech. When Mali had finished, the king arose and wagged his long tail in an amicable manner, then slowly disappeared with his suite over the roof of the pavilion.

Immediately, as though at a given signal, the crowd, who had kept themselves at a respectful distance, now entered the courtyard and surrounded our three friends. Their frolics and smiling faces clearly proved that their intentions were quite friendly. Hanouman, the object of especial attention, seemed to be singing his master's praises to his new acquaintances; he was undoubtedly explaining to them who these strange individuals were, so similiar in form to the Simian race.

The travellers complacently allowed themselves to be discussed, and in their turn were greatly interested in watching these curious little people. It was easy to distinguish important personages by their sleek, well-cared-for

Mali bowed respectfully to him.

Page 138.

appearance and dignified demeanour. But the little ones especially amused André—they, more daring than the adults, came and twitched at his clothes, and played all sorts of innocent pranks. The mothers, with their young ones in their arms, looked somewhat timid, and kept themselves well aloof from the strangers.

After having introduced himself, Mali set about looking for a place of shelter, and installed himself with his baskets in one of the pavilions on the terrace. As for the young men, they started off to explore the palace accompanied by their new friends.

Passing through the Wonderful Gate, they entered a courtyard, in the centre of which was a fairy-like garden. To the left of the garden rose a spacious pavilion, surrounded on the ground-floor by a wide, beautifully-sculptured verandah. Entering this building they found themselves in an immense hall, inlaid with mosaics and incrustations. The mosaics were formed of precious stones, agates, hip stones, turquoises, and fragments of crystal. One can but faintly imagine the effect produced in this hall, when a ray of sunlight entering, fell upon the floor and made the crystal flowers chased in the panels sparkle like diamonds.

The upper story, which our friends afterwards visited, was a coquettish marble kiosk; on one side were large casements, enclosed by delicate marble trellis-work, looking out over the valley and commanding an admirable view; on the other a beautiful terrace stood out as far as the branches of the pomegranates and fig-trees in the garden. It was the most romantic retreat that could possibly be

imagined, and the young people were determined to persuade Mali to spend the night here.

On the other side the garden extended a long line of palaces, all as admirable for their beauty of style and splendid decorations as the first. In one of them the walls were covered with sandal wood inlaid with silver and ivory; little rivulets traversed the rooms and fell into basins inlaid with mosaics representing fish, aquatic plants, lotus, and queer-looking reptiles. Others were simply covered with white marble, with borders of lapis lazuli, or green serpentine marble, or else ornamented with miniatures, representing the chase, battles, and mythological scenes; lastly in every room were found objects well worthy of being seen and admired.

In the evening our travellers took up their quarters in the marble kiosk, where the monkeys brought them fruit, which Hanouman had set them the example of gathering for his masters.

Night at last came, and the inhabitants of the palace retired to their respective resting-places; but before going to sleep the travellers had the satisfaction of seeing the walls well-guarded by numerous and vigilant sentinels.

"The raft followed the middle of the current."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CYCLONE.

OUR three friends were awakened very early next morning by the joyous "Hou! hou!" of the inhabitants of the palace of Amba greeting the approach of sunrise. The inflexible Mali at once gave the signal for departure.

André and Miana first of all took a dip in the fountain of the garden, which was filled by a clear, cool stream; then, refreshed by their bath and a good night's rest, they took up their baskets and again started on their journey. Mali had preceded them, and they found him in the principal courtyard, making his obeisance to the king of the lan-

gours, who, quite insensible to this politeness, was unceremoniously munching a fine orange. The young people in their turn bowed to his impassive majesty, and then the little band made their way towards the castle gates. The crowd of monkeys, as eager as ever to see the travellers, escorted them beyond the palace precincts, and a few brave ones accompanied them half-way down the descent. But having gone thus far, they showed signs of timidity on finding themselves at some distance from the walls, and there was a general leave-taking with the new friends. It may easily be imagined how touching the adieux were. Hanouman undertook to express his master's thanks, and for a few minutes the affectionate creatures embraced each other with comical effusion, and uttered little pitiful cries.

"It is enough to make one think that monkeys are better than men," exclaimed André at this sight. "Since I left my father's house in ruins, I have met no men to be compared to these hospitable langours."

"But," said Miana, "monkeys are men. Once upon a time, they spoke as we do, and as proof of this, there are the beautiful discourses which the divine Hanouman held with Rama, written at full length in the Slokas, which are recited during the festival of Dassara. One day, a monkey having entered Paradise, was surprised in the council-hall of the gods, where they were discussing the fate of humankind. The cunning beast, however, made his escape, and could never be found. But for fear that the immortal secrets should be divulged, the gods deprived all monkeys of speech, or at least, rendered their language unintelligible

to man ; for monkeys speak, and understand us, but we do not understand them."

André, whilst inwardly making a reserve on this delicate subject, took good care not to dispute the point with his friend Miana, whose boundless admiration for the Simian race he well knew.

The travellers again passed through the silent streets of the dead city, and came to one of the gates leading out of the valley. Within a few steps from the enclosure, was the dark, impenetrable forest.

For some days the little band courageously travelled on in a north-westerly direction, without anything worthy of note occurring. Each evening the fugitives chose a tree, and took refuge in it for the night, after having taken the precaution to light a large fire which would last till day-break. Every night they witnessed frightful scenes, like those which had so alarmed André on their first night in the Térai; but the young Frenchman was getting more accustomed to the nocturnal disturbances, and if he did not sleep as soundly as his companions, he at least took sufficient rest.

By degrees, as the travellers advanced more towards the north, the aspect of the Térai grew more modified. The forest was less dense; the soil drier and freer from underwood ; and the giant trees stood wider apart, and formed vaults less dark and gloomy. At the frequent clearings, they now had glimpses of the lofty snow-clad summits of the Himalayas, towering above rocks covered with fir-trees. The out-lying spurs of the mountains

seemed to be scarcely more than a few miles from the road followed by the travellers.

Nevertheless, Mali still kept to a north-westerly direction, and when André and Miana asked him why he did not at once make towards the mountain, he replied,—

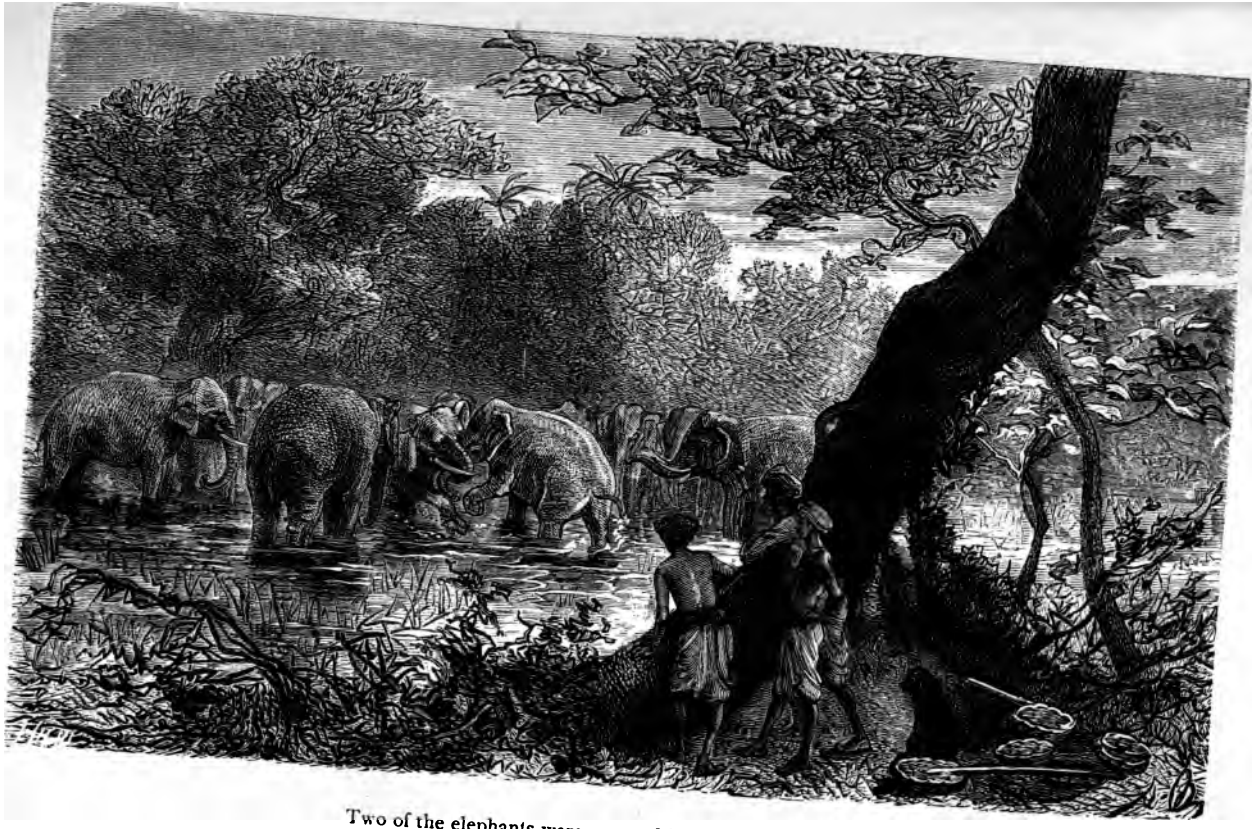
"We must on no account do that; the mountains that you see are inhabited by a tribe whose chief would be greatly pleased to deliver us over to Nana Sahib. However complete Andhra's disguise may be, we must not think of running any needless risks."

Very complete indeed was André's disguise. No one would have recognized the half-naked, sun-burnt savage as the elegant Parisian student, or the brilliant guest of Bihtour.

One day, as they were passing through a wood surrounding an immense marsh, the travellers were all at once surprised by a great noise, which arose at a short distance from the path they were following.

They could hear loud roars and dull shocks like those produced by a battering-ram against a thick oaken door, and to this noise was added a continuous splashing of water. A few steps further the travellers were confronted by a startling spectacle.

The marsh was filled with a troop of elephants ranged in a circle round two of their party, who were engaged in a furious duel. The combatants in question—two fine male elephants, with long curved tusks—were fighting with indescribable rage. Their foreheads clashed violently together, their tusks were crossed, and in their mad fury they



Two of the elephants were engaged in a furious duel.

made the muddy water of the marsh foam and leap around them.

One of the monsters, however, was evidently getting the worst of it, and he already seemed to be thinking of beating a retreat. Suddenly he made a desperate rush at his opponent, half raised him from the ground, and almost overturned him ; but without continuing the struggle, the assailant, profiting by his adversary's surprise, quickly turned tail, and fled.

Mali and his companions had scarcely time to spring into the underwood when the enormous elephant dashed along the path like lightning, quickly followed by the conqueror and the whole troop.

"A moment later," said the charmer, we should have been surprised by these infuriated beasts, and trampled under foot."

"What could have been the reason for the fight ?" asked André. "All the elephants that I have ever seen in our *keddahs*[1] were gentle and inoffensive, and agreed perfectly among themselves."

"The cause of the fight is simple enough," replied Mali. "Every troop of elephants has a chief; but he does not hold his power undisputed, and when he becomes old and feeble, some young ambitious elephant challenges him to fight before the whole troop, and after chasing away the old chief the conqueror assumes the command. Henceforth the vanquished elephant lives alone and forsaken in the

[1] The name "keddah" is given to the immense enclosures in which half-tamed elephants are kept.

jungle; he becomes what hunters call a hermit. Ferocious and wild, the hermit lives at open war with all nature; he attacks everything that comes in his way—tigers, rhinoceroses, and even men; and in his blind fury pillages right and left to the very outskirts of the forest. The fight we have just witnessed was nothing else than the banishment of one of these old chiefs. But even when domesticated, elephants are not always quiet and inoffensive. In a state of intoxication or transient fit of madness, they are as belligerent as their wild brothers. The Indian princes, taking advantage of this disposition, make them fight either together or with wild beasts, sometimes even with men. I remember, when I was at the court of Poonah, being present at an elephant fight, when no less than twenty elephants fought with tigers, rhinoceroses, and buffaloes. Even at the present day, the Guicowar of Baroda, the powerful Mahratta king of Goozerat, keeps numbers of elephants at his court, and amuses himself with these exciting spectacles."

That evening the travellers halted in a spot of marvellous beauty. The forest opened in a kind of circus, through which flowed a clear stream, falling in a cascade from a high barrier of rocks. At the foot of the cascade was an overflowing basin, surrounded by a green sward, as even as a well-kept English lawn. A grand old fig-tree, with a thousand columns, spread its enormous branches over the water; and the network of creepers drooping from them, formed a kind of floral hammock.

The young people quickly began to explore this citadel of verdure, which would have held a score of people on the

platform at the point of intersection of its branches. Here the serpent-baskets and provisions were placed. But in climbing along the branches, André and Miana quickly discovered the natural hammock of creepers suspended above the water. This network of ligneous fibres closely entwined formed such a coquettish nest, well-lined with leaves and moss, that our young friends at once made up their minds to pass the night here. Mali, preferring a more solid resting-place, arranged his bed on the platform of the trunk.

Each having made his arrangements to his liking, the frugal meal quickly despatched, and the watch-fire lighted, the travellers laid down peacefully to sleep.

Towards midnight André began to dream that he was on board the ship which brought him to Calcutta. He seemed to feel himself rocked in his little cabin-bed, and could hear the roar of the waves. The ship was drawing near port; to-morrow they would enter the Ganges; he would soon be at Calcutta, and in a few days would see his father and sister. How delightful it was for him to be coming back to his adopted country, and what pleasure it would be to his friends to find him so much grown and improved—a young man, in fact.

Suddenly a frightful noise startled André from his sleep, and he found himself beside his friend Miana in the aerial cradle of the fig-tree. A violent hurricane was sweeping through the forest; the rain coming down in torrents had extinguished the fire, and the darkness was illumined by vivid flashes of lightning.

"The *tofân!*" exclaimed Miana, awaking.

"A cyclone!" said André: "then we are lost."

One must have lived in India to understand the horror and alarm evoked by this word "cyclone." No scourge can be compared to this terrible atmospheric meteor, for all the forces of nature are powerless against it. The whirlwind carries everything before it in its giddy vortex: ancient trees, stone houses,—nothing can resist it. Every year its victims are counted by thousands. Bengal alone, in 1837, lost a million of its inhabitants in one night by the cyclone; in 1876, five hundred thousand victims were swept away by one of these terrible tempests.

The cyclone was now venting its fury on the Téraï. Vivid blue flashes filled the dark forest with lurid light, and the peals of thunder were deafening; giant trees bent like straws before the gale.

Mali, screened in his shelter, entreated the two lads to leave their frail bed of creepers, and take refuge near him.

But they had already several times vainly attempted to follow his advice. They must have crossed the narrow stem which connected the hammock with the fig-tree, and the gusts of wind were so violent that any attempt to do this would have been fatal. The peaceful basin had become a stormy lake,—its boiling waters filled the clearing and swept round the foot of the tree. Thus it was impossible to escape by letting themselves fall to the ground.

However, the place was becoming untenable; the hurricane tossed the cradle of creepers to and fro with such

violence, that every instant its occupants expected to feel the frail structure give way. Flashes of lightning, following each other in rapid succession, showed them the old charmer in safety on the platform, a few yards from them.

All at once the lightning seemed to envelope the tree; there was a terrible crash of thunder, immediately followed by a frightful crackling, and before they could move, the boys felt the branch separate from the trunk and carry them away in its fall.

In falling, André and Miana clasped each other tightly with an instinctive movement, and closing their eyes went to their death.

To their great surprise, instead of disappearing beneath the water, they felt themselves, after a few moments, floating on the surface of the foaming torrent. The enormous branches, with its appendage of creepers, formed a raft, and was borne along by the current.

On seeing themselves thus carried away, the boys shouted several times "Mali! Mali!" but no voice answered them. Besides, a human voice would have been quite lost in the midst of the tumult of the elements; without reflecting on this fact, the poor lads gave vent to their despair.

The raft, gliding rapidly along with the current, carried them into the heart of the forest. They shot like an arrow, sometimes through narrow ravines bordered with trees, sometimes over rapids formed by rocks.

After several hours of this giddy, headlong course, the storm began to abate; there was a rift in the thick curtain

of clouds, and through it, by the faint light of dawn, could be seen the blue sky.

The first discovery that Miana made was his monkey Hanouman, who, crouching among the creepers, had shared his master's fate. The boys tenderly embraced each other, and then anxiously looked at the sky.

"Worse luck!" exclaimed Miana at last, "the river is carrying us towards the south."

"In that case," said André, with alarm, "we shall soon be out of the Téraï, and we shall most likely fall into the hands of our cruel enemies."

"We must stop our raft as quickly as possible," said Miana. "As soon as we get near the bank, try and catch hold of some of the branches hanging over the side; we shall be able to land in that way."

Unfortunately, the raft followed the middle of the current. For several long hours the poor lads tried in vain to get near the bank. At last a gigantic tree, struck by lightning, lay across the torrent and stopped their course. In the twinkling of an eye, the boys and Hanouman made use of this improvised bridge, and gained the land. Their first impulse was to utter exclamations of thankfulness at their miraculous escape; then remembering the extent of their misfortune, they fell in each other's arms and burst into tears.

"What will become of us without poor Malf?" exclaimed André.

"I saw the lightning strike him on the tree," said Miana.

"He must have fallen into the torrent, and, less fortunate than ourselves, have been swallowed up by the waters."

"Alas! that is but too probable," said André; "should we not set out and look for him?"

"Do you think so?" replied Miana; "it would take us at least two days to walk back as far as the torrent carried us in the night. We must bear in mind Mali's last advice: keep on walking in a north-westerly direction till we reach Mussourie."

"Yes, indeed," said André, "we must get out of here as quickly as possible. But if I am not mistaken, Mali calculated that we had still a six or eight days' march before us; you say that the torrent has taken us back two days, so now that makes almost ten days. How shall we live during this time, for we have not even a handful of flour to make a tchapti?"

"Mahadeo will have pity on us," replied Miana, "and my monkey, Hanouman, will help us. His friends have no difficulty in finding food for themselves in these forests; he is as skilful as they are, and perhaps we shall be able to share his meals. Ah, look! there he is on that branch yonder, munching something. Perhaps he has already found our breakfast."

The boys ran to the tree discovered by Hanouman: it proved to be a mango-tree, covered with fruit, which, if not as succulent as the delicious mangoes of Bombay, was at least edible.

The fugitives regaled themselves with this fruit. Then Miana calling his monkey, the little band set out, walking in a north-westerly direction, towards the longed-for place of safety.

"A moment later the wood was in flames."

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH THE MÉTCHIS.

OVERCOME with fatigue, having partaken of no other food than the wild fruit found by Hanouman, the two lads halted towards nightfall to look for a resting-place. A suitable tree was soon found, and Miana set to work as usual to collect dead branches, and heap them at the foot of the tree.

"What are you doing there?" asked André, who had watched this proceeding with astonishment.

"Well! I am making up a fire for the night," replied the young *Nât*. "Did you think, then, that we might do

without it? Look at those peacocks in the trees: that is a sure sign that the forest is infested with tigers. Besides, all to-day I have seen the trace of their feet. If you do not want to be crunched in the night, do like me, for it will be dark in a few minutes."

"But, my poor Miana," said André, "have you forgotten that we have lost everything, and that the matches were left with Mali?"

"I have forgotten nothing whatever," replied Miana, laughing, "but I do not want matches to make a fire. Wait a moment, and you shall see."

The young Hindoo first of all picked up a piece of dry wood; then, having searched about for a few moments, he came back with a piece of flat granite. He placed a handful of *azédérach* fibre between the stone and the wood, and began to crush it by rubbing vigorously; this species of tinder, heated by the friction, began to get soft and stick to the wood, and soon caught fire. A moment later the wood was in flames, which Miana fanned till there was a bright fire crackling, and sending out sparks in all directions.

"You see it is not very difficult," said Miana. "Now we must make haste and go to bed, for the concert will soon begin."

An hour later, in fact, deafening roars from all parts of the forest proved that Hanouman's master had not been mistaken. André was awakened several times by the noise, which, however, did not prevent him from taking advantage of his night's rest.

The next morning at daybreak, the fugitives came down from their tree, and Hanouman undertook to find the breakfast. All his researches resulted in a handful of sour plums, which our friends partook of with wry faces.

"Well! if the first breakfast, the *tchota haziri*, is meagre," said Miana, by way of consolation, "it is undoubtedly because the second, the *nachta*, is to be abundant."

They were just about to start again, when the brushwood was noisily parted, and a fine black antelope, coming out of the thicket, bounded past them.

"Ah! if I only had a gun," cried André, at this sight, "we should have had a good breakfast then."

Without answering him Miana had gone in pursuit of the animal, and soon his companion heard him calling to him from the midst of the brushwood. Not knowing what to think, André answered the call with all speed, and to his great surprise, he saw the young Hindoo stooping over the body of the antelope.

"What, Miana, have you killed her?" said he, with an accent of pity, and already reproaching himself for the wish he had uttered at sight of this fine animal.

"No, no," quickly replied the *Nât*. "I did not have that trouble. As she passed us I saw that her sides were marked with blood. And then I thought, which proves to be right, that, wounded to death by some wild beast, she had succeeded in freeing herself, and was thus madly flying away to end her days quietly in some secluded spot. I had scarcely gone any distance in pursuit, when I saw her fall there; when I came up she was dying. My lords the

tigers have provided us a fine breakfast, without reckoning that the poor animal will furnish us with food for several days."

And without further parley, the young Hindoo, taking the dead antelope on his shoulder, carried it to the clearing, and placed it on the ground near the glowing embers which were still left of the watch-fire. Then drawing out their short daggers, which both of them carried at their waist-bands, they set to work to skin the animal and cut it up. André, like a true hunter, excelled in this profession, and the poor antelope, transformed into cutlets, already excited no other sentiment than a good appetite. Very soon some of the best pieces, placed in the middle of the fire on flat stones, were being roasted.

"What a breakfast!" exclaimed Miana enthusiastically; and turning towards his monkey, "My poor Hanouman," said he, "it is a pity that the gods have forbidden thee meat; all this is of no use to thee."

"But I thought," said André, laughing, "that the gods had also forbidden you, as well as all good Hindoos, the use of meat."

"Oh dear no, my good sir!" gaily replied the Indian. "Miana is a good Hindoo, but Brahma, Vichnu, and Siva have given him permission to eat whatever he likes except the flesh of the cow, for it was man's first nurse, and its milk formed our blood."

The lads were this time able to appease their hunger, though André made a wry face as he swallowed the half raw meat without salt or bread. When they had finished

their breakfast they covered the embers with green branches, on which they placed the remainder of the flesh of the antelope. When it was sufficiently dried by the smoke to keep for several days they packed it in leaves, and set out on their journey, thus provided with food.

For a week they journeyed on, only halting at nightfall and walking from dawn to sunset. The antelope flesh diminished rapidly, and wild fruit was scarce; thus they hastened on as much as possible, thinking they would soon be at their journey's end. In fact, the aspect of the country became more and more modified. Once again, as when the cyclone had separated them from Mali, they could see before them the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas. The forest grew less dense, the marshes were fewer, and the ground became more undulating.

On the eighth day the young travellers reached the foot of a hill, whose verdant, gently-rising slopes were planted with magnificent trees.

Directly Hanouman saw the trees he jumped off his master's shoulder and ran to the nearest; picking up the fruit which lay strewn on the ground he began to eat it greedily. At the same time Miana cried out "Mhowahs;" and following the monkey's example, both he and André began to pick up the fruit.

They were in fact mhowahs which covered the hill-side. This tree is to the wild regions of India what the cocoa-nut tree is to the shores of the Indian Ocean. Nature has endowed it with such wonderful properties, that it alone furnishes the primitive inhabitants of the Indian forests

with all that more industrious nations expect from the whole vegetable kingdom.

The mhowah is a magnificent tree: its straight trunk of extensive diameter spreads out its boughs regularly and gracefully like the branches of a candelabra, and its dark-green foliage, rising in dome fashion, affords ample shade from the sun. Towards the end of February its leaves fall almost suddenly, and the tree is left bare. The natives collect the leaves, and use them for many purposes. A few days after the fall of the leaves, with astonishing rapidity the boughs are covered with a mass of flower, resembling clusters of small round berries. These flowers are the celestial manna of the jungle, and their greater or less abundance makes prosperity or poverty in these wild regions. Their corolla of a pale yellow colour forms a thick-skinned pulpy berry, the size of a grape, through which the stamen passes by a small opening; on reaching maturity, the corolla falls off. The Indians content themselves with clearing away the brushwood around the trees, and every evening carefully gather the flowers which have fallen in the day. This shower lasts for several weeks.

When fresh, the flower-fruit of the mhowah has a sweet taste agreeable to the palate, but to which is added a pungent, almost repulsive perfume. The natives consume great quantities of it in this state; they also make it into cakes and different dishes of very nutritive properties. The greater part of the harvest is dried on osier riddles. This operation does away with the disagreeable perfume of the fruit; it is afterwards reduced to flour and then made into

bread. By a process of fermentation, the flower of the mhowah produces a very agreeable wine, which ought to be drunk fresh; if distilled, strong brandy is obtained, which the ungrateful Indians consider as the most precious production of the tree, and which, with age, may compare with good Scotch whisky. Good vinegar is extracted from the residue of the flowers.

As soon as the flower has disappeared, the foliage comes on again and rapidly covers the tree. Then in the month of April comes the real fruit, succeeding the blossom. This fruit, closely resembling our almonds, has a very delicate flavour. The Indians make cakes and puddings of it; they extract very excellent oil by simple pressure, and the residue is used to fatten their buffaloes.

Lastly, to conclude the enumeration of the wonderful properties of the mhowah, let us add, that from its bark is obtained a ligneous fibre, which serves to make rope; and that its wood though soft and of unequal grain, is invaluable for the construction of huts, since it is proof against worm and termite.

In making a rapid recapitulation of the preceding lines, we find the mhowah furnishes nourishing food in its flowers, and fruit, bread, wine, brandy, vinegar, oil, a textile substance, and valuable wood for building. What vegetable in the world is of greater value?

One can hardly be surprised, then, that the uncivilized inhabitants of the Indian forests have made the mhowah the emblem of divinity. It is to it they owe their existence; it is beneath its shade that they hold their assemblies and

celebrate the great epochs of their lives; it is on its branches they hang their great *ex-votos*, lances and ploughshares; it is between its roots that they arrange those mysterious circles of pebbles which serve them in place of idols. Thus they fight like madmen in defence of their mhowahs; for the Hindoos of the plains, not knowing what retaliation to make these unattainable savages, take possession of their trees, and cut them down. Where the mhowah disappears the wild Indian is seen no more.

Having regaled themselves with the flowers of the precious mhowah, André and Miana began to climb the hill. On reaching the summit they overlooked a vast extent of country. At their feet opened a narrow valley, through which flowed a river, winding onward in a north-westerly direction, till it reached a fertile plain, shut in at the horizon by the green slopes of a spur of the Himalayas.

"Ouah! Ouah!" shouted Miana almost wild with delight, "here we are at last!"

"How can that be?" asked André.

"Do you see that bluish peak which looks as though the top were broken off? It is the Sinhadanta, the Lion's Tooth, which overlooks the source of the holy Jumna. Beyond those green hills is Mussourie; and that plain which we shall reach in two days is the Dehra Doun, through which flows the Ganges."

"Ah! if only Mali were here to share our joy and gaze on the promised land with us," said André, falling on his knees, and thanking heaven in his heart for its protection.

Then getting up: "Come along, Miana," cried he, "let us hasten to the deliverance of my father and sister."

They quickly descended into the valley, but the shades of night were beginning to fall, and they were obliged to look about for a resting-place. The narrow defile offered but young mhowahs, too weak to bear the fugitives, and all around them was nothing but a tangled mass of prickly underwood. Even the crest of the hill was formed by a line of perpendicular rocks, apparently inaccessible. Here and there, at certain intervals, on the peaks of the promontories formed by the line of rocks, were heaps of dried underwood much resembling gigantic birds' nests in appearance.

"What can those heaps of underwood mean?" asked André. "They look like nests. Can we be in the valley which Sindbad the Sailor went through, for it must take such birds as he describes to fill nests like those?"

Miana, at this question, stood still horror-struck, and gazed intently at the mysterious nests; then suddenly he exclaimed, "We must fly, we must fly! they are not nests, they are *pâls*, the dwelling-places of the cruel mountain savages, the Métchis. If they discover us we are lost."

It was already too late to fly. As though Miana's words had been a given signal, suddenly a horrible clamour resounded in the thicket, and in an instant the lads were surrounded by a horde of howling savages, armed with bows and arrows, and no other clothing than a strip of cloth round their loins. Their bows were made of strong bamboo stems, and the strings were narrow slips of the same substance; as,

for the arrows, they differed little from those formerly used by our archers.

One of these barbarians, with an eagle's plume in his thick hair, which marked him as a chief, advanced towards the boys, and glaring savagely at them, addressed them in rough and threatening terms.

"Who are you, who cast yourselves voluntarily into the jaws of death?"

"My lord," said André, "we are two poor beggars, on our way to the fair at Hardwar. We were crossing this forest with our father, when a terrible storm separated us, and we know not what has become of him."

"Have pity," added Miana, trembling with fear, "have pity on us. See, we have lost everything, and nothing can tempt you in our poor clothes."

"Enough," replied the savage Métchi, in a rough tone; "our king shall decide. Follow me. And you," said he to his companions, "just see that these young dogs do not escape into the underwood."

The band escorting the prisoners began to climb the hill-side, and following a narrow ridge of the rocky crest, they reached the table-land. Soon the boys discovered that they were taking them towards one of the heaps of dried underwood, which had attracted their attention too late. These heaps, several yards high, and of considerable thickness, formed a circular enclosure, with only one aperture: it was what the savages of India call a *pâl*.

At their approach, several women and children, as scantily clothed as the men, came running out to meet them, and

began to grossly insult the prisoners; but the savage warriors surrounded the two captives, and prevented the howling crowd from approaching them. They made them pass through the narrow opening into the *pâl*, the centre of which was occupied by a massive, roughly-built stone house, with a flat roof of immense slate flags.

It was now quite dark: a large fire, lighted before the door of the house, cast a ruddy glow on the whole scene. Near the fire was a savage sitting cross-legged on a kind of seat, the wooden framework of which was covered with a matting of plaited creepers. He wore no more clothing than the others; but a pair of heavy gold bracelets on his wrists, a bare sword placed before him, in addition to the ordinary bow and arrows, as well as the circle of savages grouped around him, indicated plainly that this was the king of the Métchis.

"Whom hast thou there, Mousa?" said he in a rough tone, to the chief who was conducting the prisoners.

"Bhaï!" replied Mousa, "these are two young vagabonds whom my men surprised as they were pillaging your mhowah plantations. We caught them just as they were preparing to fly."

"Ah!" said the king, addressing the young men, "so this is the way you come and rob my lands? I did not think such as you would have been so daring. A Hindoo to brave the Bhaï of the Métchis, even in his own den! was ever such a thing heard of?"

"My lord," said André humbly, "I have already explained to your chief, Mousa, that it was without the least thought

of doing wrong that we ate some of your mhowah flowers. We are *Vâts*, poor serpent-charmers. We were going with our father to the fair at Hardwar, when a storm overtook us and separated us from him. Stripped of everything, we have had no other food than the wild fruit of the forest; and in taking your mhowahs we had no idea that we were trespassing."

"The lying Hindoos' tale again!" angrily exclaimed the king. "You chase and hunt us down like wild beasts; after having robbed us of those plains which belonged to us with their rich harvests of wheat, now you want to drive us from these dark mountains, where Mahadeo has planted the mhowah to save us from starvation. And then when you feel yourselves in our clutches, you call us 'lord and master,' and pretend to be very humble innocents. Do you imagine I can forget the grudges we owe you? Not one Hindoo has ever escaped alive out of my hands. In two days there will be a new moon; when its silver crescent appears in the sky, your blood shall flow beneath the knife of the sacrificer, at the foot of the sacred mhowah. Do you hear, Mousa?" added he, turning towards the chief; "you answer with your head for these two young yellow-faced dogs. Take them away, and watch them well."

André endeavoured again to soften the ferocious king, but the savages gave him no time, and dragged him brutally out of the *pâl*, and Miana with him,—who, pale and trembling with fear, still held his monkey convulsively pressed in his arms.

After a quarter of an hour's march, which led them past

"Not one Hindoo has ever escaped alive out of my hands."

Page 164.

numerous *pâls*, from which the people came out to insult them, the poor lads came to the place which was to serve as their prison.

It was a large shed made with trunks of trees and bamboos, supported against the side of the mountain, which thus formed the back wall of the structure. A space had been left between two tree-trunks, which served as a doorway. In front of the entrance stood a magnificent old mhowah, its trunk adorned with numerous *ex-voto*, and against it was a rough stone altar, the place of punishment facing the prison.

The prisoners were tightly bound with withies of green creepers, and thrown brutally into the hut. Alarmed by this operation Hanouman had sprung out of his master's arms on to the thatched roof of the prison, and from there he quickly gained the jungle which covered the summit of the hill; before the savages had recovered from their surprise, the intelligent animal had disappeared.

When once alone the boys burst into tears. Poor Miana's grief was so great, especially since the loss of his monkey, that André at last forgot the bitterness of his own trouble in trying to console his friend.

"Listen," said he, "all hope is not yet lost. To-morrow morning I will beg our guards to take me before the king, and then I will explain that instead of being a simple *Nât*, I am the son of a wealthy European. I will ask him to decide upon a ransom, which a trustworthy man may go for to Mussourie. I do not doubt for a moment but that the English Governor, on learning our sad misfortune,

will at once send the sum agreed upon for our deliverance."

"Do you think that the Bhaï of the Métchis would consent to send some one to Mussourie?" asked Miana, with an air of doubt. "I am very much afraid that he likes Europeans no better than Hindoos."

"Oh, I am sure he does!" replied André. "My father, who has travelled a great deal in Central India, said that the Gounds and the Bhîls, who are so cruel to the natives, are humane and even hospitable towards white men."

"Let us hope that the Métchis are no worse than their fellow-countrymen," said the young Hindoo. "But if we do get away from here, who will give me back my good Hanouman? He must be frightened at being alone, and I am afraid he will now have got far into the forest."

"Who knows? Perhaps he has not gone any distance," continued André; "and on our departure we shall see him back again."

At this moment the heavy door of the hut was opened, and the chief, Mousa, entered. His staggering walk showed that he had been partaking freely of libations of mhowah-flower brandy, in honour of the approach of the new moon. The savage, carrying a flaming brand, approached the prisoners, and looking at them with a dull, stupified stare, repeated every now and then, with the persistence of a drunken man, "The Bhaï said that I should answer for both with my head!" At last, satisfied with his examination, he noisily shut the door, and rejoined the circle of his com-

rades, who were squatting round the fire, and helping themselves to large bumpers of brandy.

"You see," said Miana, "we are well guarded."

"Not so well as all that," said André. "Mousa is tipsy now, and in a few minutes he will be dead drunk; and if I can judge from that glimpse I had of them, his companions will soon be no better than he."

"Oh, if we could but break our bonds and fly!"

"Yes, but how are we to do it?" continued André. "Our daggers have been taken away from us, and I doubt if we could succeed in biting through all these fetters. Then if Mousa surprised us in the act, nothing could save us from his wrath. It will be better to wait for daylight, and try to soften the Bhaï, or at least excite his cupidity."

During this whispered colloquy, all had grown silent outside the hut.

André dragged himself with difficulty to the door, and by looking through a chink, he tried to make out how their guards were placed. That which the young man had foreseen had happened; intoxicated by the libations of mhowah, the savages were stretched on the ground asleep; however, haunted even in intoxication by his responsibility, Mousa had rolled himself across the prison door, and thus made it doubly secure, so that escape by that means was out of the question. The walls alone were left; but on three sides the entwined stems of bamboo formed a rampart which a volley of musketry could not have broken through, and the two lads patiently sought in vain for some

flaw in the building. On the fourth side was the bare rock. Lastly, the thatched roof was too high for them to hope to reach it.

"You see, Miana, I was right," said André sadly; "flight is impossible. We have now no other resource than the Bhaï's cupidity."

At that moment there was a slight noise on the roof.

"That is poor Hanouman, who does not like to leave us," murmured Miana. "Poor creature; he has come back to prowl round, and try to be of some use to us."

"Hush!" said André, "it is not Hanouman!"

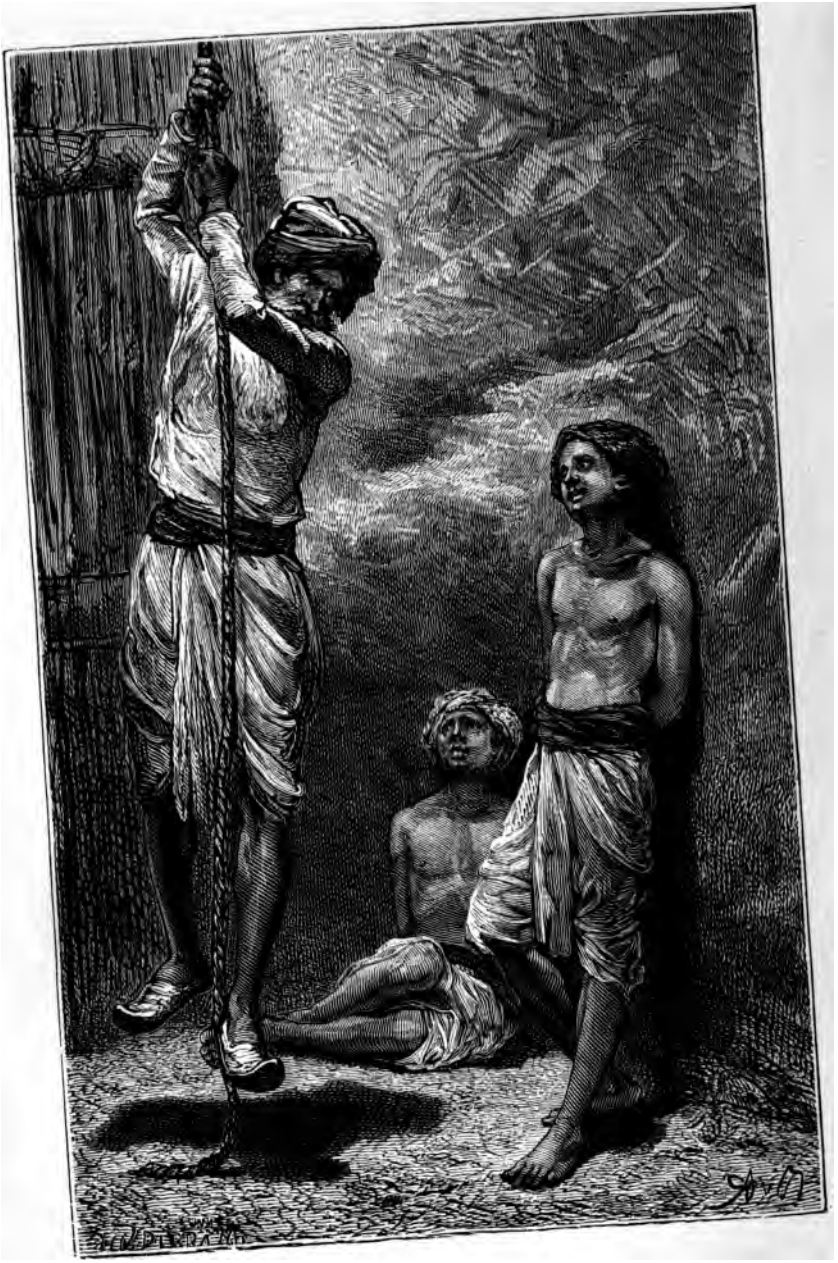
In fact, the mysterious being on the roof seemed to be making a hole in the thatch, the twigs of which fell in showers round the prisoners, who held their breath with fear. All at once a large piece was taken away by an invisible hand, and the boys could see the stars shining through this opening. Then a man's head advanced cautiously, and these words reached the prisoners' ears:—

"Andhra Sahib, are you there?"

"Thank Heaven! it is Mali!" exclaimed the two youths, forgetting all prudence in their great joy and unspeakable surprise.

"Silence," continued the voice, "and do not stir. Our lives depend upon your prudence."

The exclamations of the prisoners had, in fact, attracted the attention of the vigilant Mousa, who partially roused himself and attempted to get up; but, overcome with drunkenness, he fell heavily back on the ground.



Old Mali glided to the ground. Page 169.

A minute later a rope, passed through the aperture in the roof, hung down into the hut, and with an agility quite astonishing for his age, old Mali glided to the ground beside the boys. In the twinkling of an eye he had cut their fetters; then, having silently embraced them,—

"Not a word," he said in a whisper, "and out of here. You first, my lord."

André obeyed, and hoisting himself up by the rope, he reached the opening made by Mali and crept out on to the roof. Miana and the charmer quickly followed him.

Having reached the roof, Mali drew up the rope; then taking the piece of thatch which he had cut out, he carefully replaced it so as to completely hide the opening.

"He will be clever now," muttered the old man, "who can discover how we escaped. Whilst they are hunting for us in the valley, we shall be far away over the mountain."

Above them now rose a wall of perpendicular rock; but there also hung a rope, prepared for the fugitives, and one after another they reached the summit.

Mali again drew the rope up after him, rolled it carefully, and carried it with him; then, followed by the young men, he entered the jungle. A few steps further on the fugitives reached a tree, at the foot of which the charmer had left his baskets. What was the surprise of the two young men to find the good monkey Hanouman here. Miana's delight was excessive, but Mali left him no time to go into raptures.

"I fastened thy monkey there," said he; "for I was afraid if he followed me he might betray us."

"But how is it Hanouman is with you?" exclaimed Miana.

"And you, Mali, how is it you came so miraculously to our aid?" said André, in his turn.

"Will you both be so good as to hold your tongues?" said the old man. "I will explain it all in due time, but at present we must think of nothing but how to get from here as quickly as possible. We have still four hours of darkness, which ought to put us out of reach of pursuit. At daybreak we shall be near the plain where there are villages, for I know the country well, and we can rest there in safety."

The fugitives were already far away, when Mousa, awakened by the screeches of the peacocks, remembered his prisoners. Somewhat uneasy at his long slumber, he opened the door and entered the hut. To his utter bewilderment, he found it deserted! In vain, half mad with terror, he searched every nook and corner. The prisoners were gone! But how? by which way?

Filled with rage and terror at the thought of the fate the implacable Bhaï had reserved for him, the chief came out of the hut, awoke the sleepers with a kick, and started in hot pursuit after the fugitives.

At the same moment, the charmer and his companions, having reached the outskirts of the Téraï, greeted the sun-

rise with cries of joy, for its first rays showed them a fertile country, richly cultivated, and dotted here and there with peaceful villages.

Almost wild with delight, the two boys danced and capered about, and hugged Mali, who regarded this outburst of joy with tears in his eyes.

"Dear Mali," said André, "what can I ever do to repay all I owe you? Do tell us how, once again, at the last moment, you have appeared and saved my life? One might almost think you a magician, as the country-people believe!"

"And how did you find Hanouman?" exclaimed Miana, taking the monkey affectionately in his arms.

"Sit down there," said the charmer, smiling; "we are now out of reach of our enemies, and my legs want rest still more than yours. You will see that there is no magic in all this, and that the hand of Mahadeo alone guided me to you.

"You can understand my grief and alarm when I saw the branch struck by lightning, and you both hurled into the foaming torrent with it. I believed you were lost, and when day broke, I came down full of despair from the tree where I had been left safe and sound. I mechanically took up one parcel of provisions and the baskets containing Sâprani and her companions, leaving your baskets, which I could not carry, and so I began my march. I walked on thus for several hours without heeding what I did; then at last I said to myself that since you were dead it was my

place to accomplish your work, and try to discover and save your sister and father."

"Oh, best of men!" exclaimed André.

"I then made up my mind to continue my way to Mussourie. I walked on for seven days, when one morning, in crossing a clearing, I perceived the traces of a fire at the foot of a tree. I examined the ground all around, and found your footprints left on the moist soil. I carefully measured these marks; and from their fineness, and the way in which the great toes turned out, I was at once convinced that it was indeed Andhra Sahib who had left them there. I found Miana's footprints close by, so I knew you had both escaped the dreadful catastrophe.

"Thenceforth, thanking Sêchnaga for his merciful protection, I set out on your track as carefully and attentively as a hunter in chase of precious game. The traces were visible and numerous: footprints, broken branches, trampled grass, abandoned fires. In vain I hurried on: I despaired of being able to overtake your young legs. However, imagine my joy when, the day before yesterday, I came across a fire which you must have left that morning, for the ashes were still warm. I hurried on like a madman all that day, till darkness obliged me to halt.

"At break of day I set out again. On all sides now I found fresh and visible traces of you. My beating heart felt you near me. At last the sun went down.

"I climbed the hill and reached the summit, and from there I saw you both down in the valley, following the bank of the river. I was about to shout to you, more out

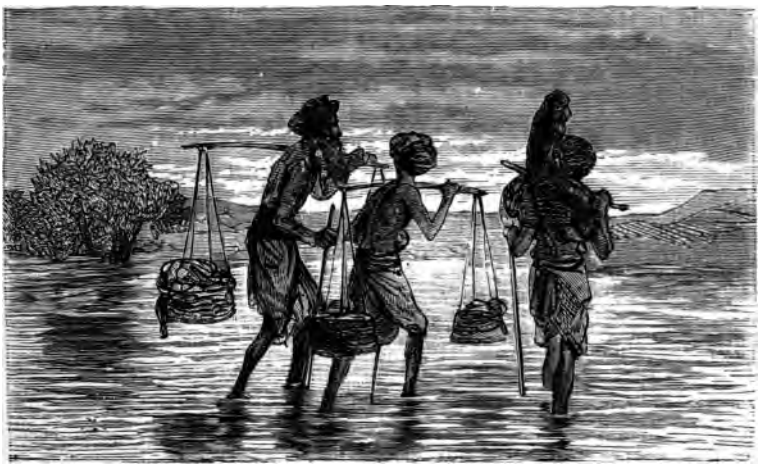
of joy at the sight of you, than with any hope of being heard, when suddenly I saw you surrounded by savages and dragged away.

"At that sight my despair was so overwhelming that I threw myself on the ground, and lay there like one dead. I knew the cruelty of the Métchis, and I knew that nothing could save you from a horrible and lingering death, for they cut up their victims alive with stone knives. At last I raised myself from the ground, and by the last gleams of daylight I saw that they were taking you to one of the *pâls*. Then I made up my mind to try and rescue you, or, if I failed, to share your fate.

"Making a circuit round the plateau, I wandered by chance through the jungle which overlooks the Métchis' *pâls*, and endeavoured to make out from the clamour which reached me some idea of your situation. Night had fallen, and I could only grope my way along. On coming to the jungle near your prison I heard a noise in the underwood, and a soft velvety creature perched itself on my shoulder. I was very much alarmed, but soon, reassured by the animal's caresses, I recognized Miana's monkey. Then I understood it all, and, guided by Hanouman, I went and sat down on the very rock above your prison. I heard your gaolers talking and jesting over your capture and condemnation to death. There was no time to lose, and in a moment I had made my plan.

"Having left Hanouman in charge of my baskets, I took a strong rope which I had amongst our baggage, and, having fastened it to a tree growing on the edge

of the rock, I let myself down on to the roof of your prison. There I waited until your guards had fallen asleep; you know the rest. In three days we shall be at Mussourie!"



The little band crossed the Ganges.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CARAVANSARAI OF MUSSOURIE.

GREAT was the astonishment of the inhabitants of the first village the fugitives reached, when they learnt that the travellers had come safe and sound through the Téraï, and the country of the terrible Métchis. These last-named savages formerly carried desolation into the valley by their frequent incursions, but since the establishment of the English in the country, they dared not leave their mountain fastnesses. The charitable Hindoos warmly welcomed the fugitives, and loaded them with provisions on their departure.

Two days later the little band crossed the Ganges, at this point reduced to a shallow watercourse, and entered the Dehra Doun. This valley, one of the most charming and picturesque in India, is shut in between the lesser chain of the Sivalik and the base of the Himalayas. Its delightful climate is a perpetual spring-time, but it abounds with wild beasts, and the tigers of the Dehra Doun are renowned above all others.

However, no harm befell our travellers in their march through, and soon they reached Rajpoor, a village situated right at the foot of the mountain on which Mussourie is built. From this point they could distinctly see the elegant buildings of the city enclosed in wonderful gardens.

With what transports of joy André started on this last stage of his journey! Little matter that the path grew rougher to climb; the young man, burning with impatience, and thinking the road too long, scaled the hill-sides to shorten the distance. They could now see the pretty English church standing proudly on a jutting rock, and, as it were, overhanging the climbers' heads. André greeted this sight with a joyous "Hurrah! Mussourie!" and began to climb with such zest that his companions could not keep up with him.

How his heart beat as he thought that yonder were liberty and peace! No more treason to fear, no more tigers to confront. He was going to be himself again, the respected Sahib, and he would at last be able to cast aside this mean beggar's garb, and all the contemptible acrobatic tricks. Then, all at once, the thought struck him, that

whilst he was free, thanks to Mali's devotion, his father and sister were still perhaps in the hands of the rebels. What was he to do with his liberty without them? Could he remain calm and tranquil at Mussourie, when those so dear to him were pining in captivity without a friend or protector? At this thought the young man's heart was wrung with grief, and as his companions were at a distance, he threw himself on the ground, and wept; but hearing Mali's footsteps, he quickly wiped away his tears and forced a smile.

"I can get no farther," cried he gaily to his old friend. "This hill has taken all the breath out of me. Perhaps I ought to have ascended the holy Himalayas with more respect."

"Yes, indeed; you take such strides," said Mali, smiling, "that even this lazy young Miana cannot keep up with you, much less your old servant."

"It is not I who am lazy," cried Miana, coming up at this moment, "but Hanouman is so greedy, I am obliged to pull him away from the trees, where he is stuffing himself with all kinds of good fruit."

"You are right, my friends, I am walking too quickly," replied André; "but you can understand my impatience. Perhaps up yonder I shall get news of my father and sister."

"Yes, yes," said Mali. "And then you must confess that you are weary of our rough, wandering life, and that you are longing to cast aside these rags, and put on clothes befitting your rank and nation."

"No, no; not that, I assure you," quickly replied André. "Far from wishing to be become an European again, I intend to remain a *Nât*."

"Ah, capital!" exclaimed Miana. "It is such fun wandering about the country like this in search of adventure; each day brings new pleasures, and the troubles last such a short while one hasn't time to feel them. Besides, you are already accustomed to our life, and I can understand that you like it. I almost feared you would want to leave us at once."

"I intend to remain a *Nât* . . . . . for some time still," continued André, smiling. "I will tell you why. Thanks to you both, I have learnt my part so well that the most practised eye could not detect me."

"Certainly not," said the charmer. "If the Brahmin Soumrou was deceived, every one else will be."

"Very well," continued the young man; "since this disguise has saved me, perhaps it will help me in saving my loved ones. At Mussourie, as in Oude, I shall continue to be Mali's son. We will try to get more precise information as to the fate of my relatives, and then we will set out in search of them, and where my capacity as an European would prevent me passing, my character as a charmer will open the way. What do you think of that, Mali?"

"I think, my lord, that you speak not only with wisdom, but like a brave man. Wherever you go, Miana and I will follow, and with the help of Mahadeo we shall accomplish your task."

"Thank you, my good friends," said André, simply. "I relied upon you."

The same evening the three travellers reached Mussourie, and as it was too late to present themselves before the Governor, they went towards the bazaar, and took up their quarters for the night in the native caravansarai.

The caravansarai was full of merchants from Thibet, on their way to Loudiana with cargoes of goat-skins, to be used in the manufacture of cashmeres. These merchants, who had been travelling for several months, had heard of the rising of the Sepoys, and fearing lest they should be plundered by the bandits, they had taken refuge at Mussourie, where they impatiently waited till they could continue their route.

Thus, directly they learnt that the travellers had come from the thick of the revolt, every one quickly surrounded them, hoping to get fresh news. Unfortunately our travellers had been too long absent from the civilized world to be able to furnish any new information, and it was the merchants, on the other hand, who told them of the extent of the disaster. After Cawnpore and Meerut, Delhi and Lucknow had fallen; on all sides the Europeans had been pitilessly massacred. However, things were beginning to take a bad turn for the rebels; the Gorkas of Nepaul and the Sikhs of the Punjaub had pronounced in favour of the English, and were marching against Lucknow and Delhi. The struggle was growing fiercer, and the result was, as yet, undecided.

André passed a restless night. The following morning,

at daybreak, he got up and made his preparations to go to the Governor's palace. Mali and he put on their best red turbans, and, guided by an urchin in the caravansarai, they came to the house of the Governor, Sir Charles Wilmot.

It was a handsome building, with long colonnades extending to the end of a lawn, which was separated by railings from the street. An English soldier in his red uniform mounted guard at the principal entrance. At sight of André and Mali coming towards him, he drew himself up, looked at them haughtily, and, seeing that they were still approaching him, he called to them roughly to be off.

"We wish to see the Governor," said André to him in English.

The purity of his pronunciation seemed to astonish the sentinel, who replied, with some hesitation, "The Governor does not receive beggars."

As the young man persisted, he lowered his bayonet, crying out brutally,—

"Come one step farther, and I will run you through, dog of a rebel!"

"What's the matter?" said an officer, who had witnessed this scene at a distance, and now came up.

"Here are two beggars, lieutenant," said the soldier respectfully, "who insist on being taken before the Governor. Some spies sent by Nana Sahib to stab the General."

"What is it you want?" said the officer, addressing Mali.

"My lord," replied he, "my son and I have come from

Cawnpore, and we have important news to communicate to the Governor."

"Are you speaking the truth?" continued the officer.

"I swear that we are!" cried André, in Hindoostanee, with such impetuosity that the Englishman eyed him attentively.

"Well, follow me," said the officer, "but remember that you will be severely punished if you have deceived me."

Walking before them, he led them up to the palace, and took them into a large room on the ground-floor. Here he left them alone, having ordered a soldier to keep a watch on them.

A quarter of an hour later one of the doors of the room opened and admitted a superior officer in undress, with white hair, and a kind, affable look; the lieutenant accompanied him.

"Here, Sir Charles," said he, "are the two beggars who have insisted so strongly on seeing you."

"What do you want of me?" said the Governor sharply, with a stern look at the two strangers.

"Oh, sir, have pity on me!" exclaimed André in English. "I am a poor European who has lost everything. My father was struck down before my eyes, and my sister carried off by the rebels."

"Poor boy!" said the General. And putting his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, he tried to calm him.

"How is it you are dressed like this? Who is this man?" he presently asked.

Then in a voice half choked with sobs, André told all his

story,—Nana's treason, his father's death, the burning of the factory, and the long and indefatigable devotion of the good Mali. The General listened with emotion to this simple and touching narrative, and several times he warmly pressed the old charmer's hand.

As he finished his story, André exclaimed, "It is my sister, my dear Bertha, whom I wish to save. My father has perhaps found friends, whilst she, I know, is in the hands of those wretches. For pity's sake, help me, sir, and my father's fortune will not suffice to show you his gratitude and mine."

"Yes, my son," said the Governor gently, "we will do all that is in our power, and you will see we shall succeed. But now you are my guest; this palace is your home. I will have clothes brought for you to replace those rags."

"Thank you, sir," replied the young man, "I cannot accept your kind offers. Until my sister is saved I mean to keep to this disguise, and I beg you will do nothing to enlighten even your men. Perhaps in this way I shall succeed in finding where my sister is imprisoned. I only ask that you will assist me in discovering the place of her captivity."

"You may rely upon my doing that," said the General; "but consider well, my young friend, what perils you are about to confront,—remember what dangers you have been exposed to in your journey here. You had better stay with me. This war will be soon over, I am certain of that, and I will then take active measures to discover the place where your sister is shut up, and restore her to liberty."

"My mind is made up," replied André simply. "In pity do not try to make me swerve from my resolution."

"No, no, my dear boy," said the General. "Heaven will bless your heroic conduct, and support you in your undertaking, seconded, too, as you are, by companions such as yours. Be assured that I will do all in my power to help you. I will send out agents about the country to try and discover where your sister is concealed. And, above all, do not leave Mussourie without seeing me again. Here is a card which will give you access to me, as you do not wish to throw off your disguise."

A few minutes later, our two friends walked proudly past the sentinel, who stared after them somewhat abashed. The brave soldier, to the end of his days, was firmly convinced that André and Mali had been despatched to assassinate General Wilmot, and that, intimidated by his surveillance, they had come away without daring to accomplish their murderous project.

On their return to the caravansarai, the two charmers found Miana very busy giving a representation in the centre of the courtyard. The good merchants of Thibet, who had never seen such wonderful performances, stood round him in a circle, and greeted each of Hanouman's tricks with frantic applause. When the representation was over, and the young man went round the company with the monkey, numerous païs[1] and peïsas fell into the

[1] The *païs* and the *peïsa* are copper coins of minute value, almost equivalent to one and two French centimes.

copper bowl which Hanouman held out to each of the spectators.

Among the merchants was a very stout man, with a rubicund, good-tempered face, who had watched the whole spectacle with lively interest. He was one of the wealthiest merchants in Chinese Thibet, and had come with the caravan to sell teas imported from Kouangsi, in the English markets. After the performance, he went up to Mali and said to him quite seriously,—

"I congratulate you, venerable stranger, on your son's talents. If that young man would go with me to Lassa, I do not doubt but that he would have great success at the Court of the Grand Lama."

"Miana is only my servant," replied Mali, "and if his skill is remarkable, it is even surpassed by the wonderful talent of my son Andhra for taming serpents and wild beasts."

"I have indeed heard," continued the tea-merchant, "through my country-people who have been in India, that in the valley of the Ganges there are Hindoos who excel in charming reptiles and making them obey them like domestic animals; but I gave little attention to these fabulous stories."

"Your lordship, on the contrary, may convince yourself of their truth," said the charmer; "and if you will allow him, my son will give you an instance of his powers of charming."

"Blessed be Buddha, who has allowed my eyes to behold already such wonders in this land, and has also brought

me into contact with such learned folk! I am Tin-to, the richest merchant of Chipki, and if you will do me the honour, you and your son and servant, to come to my rooms, I shall be most happy to share a fine dish of rice with you which my cook has just prepared. I invited some of my friends this morning, and they will be delighted to meet you.

Mali and the young men thanked the generous Tin-to, and followed him to his apartments, which comprised the two finest rooms of the caravansarai. In one of them a repast was laid out. A carpet spread over the flags served, at the same time, as table and seats. The principal dish, a mountain of rice, mutton, and fowl seasoned with raisins and *dahl*,[2] was placed on an immense copper dish in the centre; pretty plates and cups of the same metal made a glittering circle round it, and marked the guests' places.

Tin-to introduced the *Nâts* to his guests, and there was the usual exchange of salâms and ram-rams. The guests then sat down cross-legged in their places, and without further preamble attacked the pile of rice, taking handfuls, which they placed on their plates, and afterwards despatched without the help of knife or fork. Before long, dish and plates were emptied; the servants brought round ewers for the guests to wash their hands, then sweets and pistachio were served with palm brandy in place of pure water, which is drunk alone during the meal.

[2] The *dahl* is a kind of pink lentil of a delicate flavour.

The good cheer having enlivened the company, the kindly, jovial Tin-to begged his guests to favour him with a story or a song. To set the example he had his mandoline brought, and sang the celebrated Thibetan air of *Tchi tchou ha tchirimiri miri ho!* to his own accompaniment, which was received by the assembly with reiterated applause.

Mali, seated at the right of the host, afterwards gave an account of one of the *fêtes* at the Court of the Peïchva, and his somewhat high-flown descriptions made the Thibetans open their eyes.

It was then his neighbour's turn,—a robust Tartar, whose small, slanting eyes were almost hidden by the long fringe of his kalpak. He began his story thus :—

"During the ten years that I have traded in goat-skins between our country and India, I have had many startling adventures in crossing the Himalayas; but as each of you must doubtless have incurred similar risks, I fear I should only cast a gloom over our party by recurring to such painful recollections. After the narrative which the venerable Mali has just given us, it would be difficult to interest you by a description of anything less wonderful. However, a few days ago I happened to be present, not far from here, at Punderpoor, at some grand *fêtes* given in honour of one of the members of this very family of the Peïchvas, of whom the venerable charmer has been speaking.

"Punderpoor is, as you know, a very pretty town, situated on the other side the Sinhadanta, in a beautiful valley of the Himalayas. The prince who resides there

Tin-to sang to his own accompaniment.

Page 186.

extends his power over the whole Bissahir, and merchants taking the route from Chipki to Mussourie are obliged to pay him tribute.

"I reached the town very early one morning, escorted by my porters and yaks. To my great astonishment I found the bazaar filled with people. The shops were adorned with flags, the streets decorated with garlands of flowers, and every one was in holiday dress.

"I hurried to the caravansarai, which was no easy matter, considering the crowds which filled the streets, and I asked the keeper the cause of this unusual commotion. I then learnt that the Rajah of Punderpoor was that very day marrying his son to a princess of the house of the Petchvas. This was in reality only the solemn betrothal for the princess was fourteen, and her future husband scarcely seven years old. Notwithstanding the disproportion of ages, the Rajah was well pleased at this union, for the princess was not only of great nobility, but also very beautiful and immensely rich. She was to bring her husband immense estates near Cawnpore as dowry."

Moved by an indefinable feeling, André had eagerly followed the Tartar's narrative. On hearing these last words he could not help interrupting the narrator, contrary to all rules of etiquette, to ask him,—

"Have you seen the princess?"

"Certainly," continued the Tartar deliberately. "Being curious to witness the procession of the princely *cortége*, I went to the house of one of my friends, a banker, whose balconies overlook the great bazaar. First of all came

horsemen armed with gilded swords, dressed in velvet, and mounted on horses with trappings of gold cloth. They were followed by musicians, playing melodious airs on large wooden flutes and brass instruments. Then came the princess's household, and the young prince himself, sitting in a *haodah* of massive gold on a fine elephant, all bedizened with saddle-cloths and pendants. The hereditary prince is a charming child, with black eyes and hair and—"

"And what was the princess like?" again asked André, in a trembling voice.

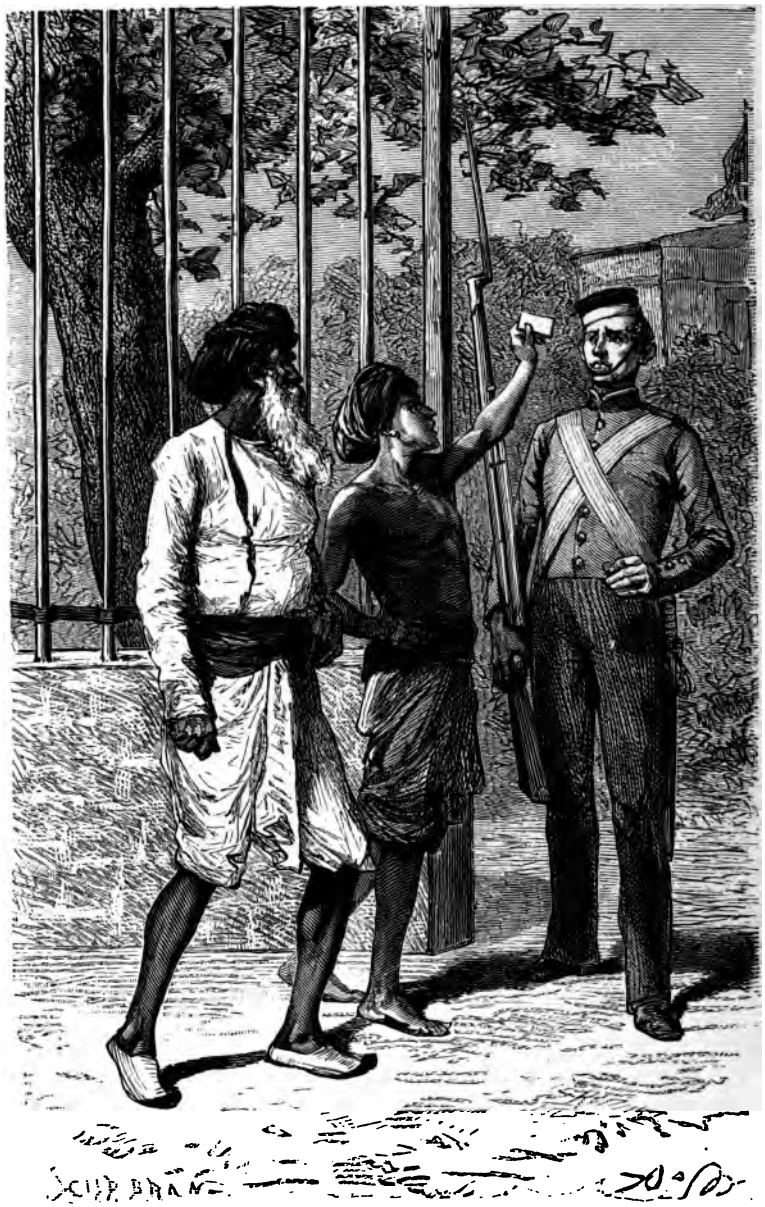
This fresh interruption was received by a murmur of disapprobation on the part of the company, and the narrator, slightly disconcerted, glanced angrily at the young man, but continued benevolently,—

"The princess came afterwards, mounted on an elephant no less richly caparisoned. Never have my eyes beheld such a vision of loveliness. Picture to yourself one of those spirits you see in paintings surrounding Buddha in the skies. Her face, as white as snow, was illumined by eyes which seemed to have borrowed their colour from the vault of heaven, and from her diamond tiara her hair fell down like a mass of gold. The people were loud in their acclamations, but her sad, pensive face—"

"O Heaven! it is my sister!" exclaimed André, unable to control his emotion any longer.

"That young man is mad," said Tin-to, quite scandalized.

But André, caring very little for the merchant's opinion



André brandished the card before the eyes of the sentinel.

Page 189.

of him, got up quickly and ran to the door, followed by Mali and Miana.

The merchants, astonished by this abrupt departure, rose in their turn, and after having expressed their indignation at the impolite behaviour of the charmers, they took their departure, before the Tartar had been able to finish his interesting story.

The description he had just heard left André with no doubts, and he was all impatience to acquaint the Governor with his discovery.

"To be sure," said Mali, as he followed the young man with some difficulty, "the Tartar's description answered up to a certain point to your sister, but—"

"But there is no 'but,'" said André impetuously. "Do you know of any princess of the house of the Peïchvas with fair hair and blue eyes except Bertha?"

"No, my lord."

"Well, then, you must see that it is she who is at Punderpoor."

"I do not deny it," said Mali, "but it would have been well to let the Tartar finish his account. We should have had more precise information. Instead of doing that, at the first word you jumped up as though you were shot, and scandalized all those good people, who might have been of use to us."

Hurrying along thus, they were soon at the palace gates, and André, brandishing the card before the eyes of the stupefied sentinel, went towards the Governor's apartments.

A minute later he was standing beside the old General, and rapidly telling him of his discovery.

"And what do you think of doing?" said Sir Charles Wilmot.

"We think of starting at once for Punderpoor," replied André enthusiastically, "to deliver Bertha from the hands of those wretches."

"Have you any plan?" continued the General.

"No, not yet, but Mali will find one," said the young man confidently; "and I feel that we shall succeed."

"God grant you may, my son," said the General, as he kissed André with emotion; "and if the blessing of an old man who loves and admires you is of any use, I bless you with all my heart. Go, and be of good courage."

Mali apologizes to Tin-to.

CHAPTER XV.

ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS.

SCARCELY had André returned to the caravansarai than he wanted to start off at once on their expedition, but Mali endeavoured to moderate his impatience.

"The country through which we are going is quite strange to me," said he. "I simply know that we shall be obliged to cross the Himalayas. Perhaps we may have to pass through snowy regions; thus we cannot start without taking special precautions. I am going to look up the Thibetian merchants, and try to apologize for your startling behaviour this morning. It is the only means we have of getting any correct information."

The charmer went towards the tea-merchant's rooms. He found that worthy man in animated conversation with the Tartar. The two men received Mali very stiffly; but without being disconcerted, the charmer began,—

"My noble sirs, I have come to offer my apologies for my son's conduct, and also for the unceremonious manner in which we left the banquet to which you did us the honour to invite us. Youth is, as you well know, too often forgetful of the rules of decorum, and apt to follow the impulse of the moment. I never thought to tell you that formerly I held the honourable position of physician to the queen at the Court of the Peïchva. My son was brought up near the young princess, whom he regarded as his sister. Since the death of the queen we have been unable to get any information of the princess, and the one great hope of our wandering profession is to find her again. This will explain our joy, and especially that of my son, when the narrative of my lord, the Tartar, informed us that she whom we were seeking was at that moment at Punderpoor at the height of honour. For my part I loved the princess as a daughter—"

"Venerable doctor," interrupted Tin-to, who, on hearing Mali's words, had risen from his chair and bowed respectfully to him, "I was not aware that in receiving you at my table I was entertaining such an eminent personage, honoured with the friendship of princes. It is I who ought to apologize, and beg you to excuse my ignorant familiarity."

"Tell my lord Andhra," eagerly added the Tartar, "that I am entirely at his service. I had already my

suspicions that you were princes in disguise, for one of my men told me just now that you had had a private interview with the inaccessible Lord Sahib, our powerful master. I was this moment telling my friend Tin-to about it."

"Precisely," said the good Thibetian. "And I was all the more surprised, since I have been here a week and have not been able to obtain one audience of the Governor."

"'Tis true," said Mali simply, "General Wilmot honours us with his friendship, and if we can do you any service by speaking to him on your behalf, my son and I will be most happy to do so. We think of starting for Punderpoor to-morrow, and we should be glad if you could furnish us with any information as to the route we should take. I should also be glad if my son and Miana could be present at our conversation."

André and his companion were standing a short distance off in the court of the caravansarai; at a sign from Mali they ran up to him. The young Frenchman made his own apologies to the merchants, who, on their part, received him with the greatest politeness.

"The town of Punderpoor," said the Tartar at last, "is about a seven days' journey from here, in the valley of the mighty river Sutledj, one of the tributaries of the Indus. The mountains you see there separate us from it. Thus you will be obliged to follow the valley of the Matchli-Nadi till you come to the village of Dérali. Then, from there turning westward, you must go through the pass of

Nila, which is an opening through the chain of the Kailas, seventeen thousand feet above the level of the sea—"

"This pass is the most terrible part of the journey," here interrupted Tin-to. "There is almost always a high wind blowing furiously and sweeping down the snow, which often buries whole caravans. Two years ago, my nephew, who was then making the journey to India, in my place, perished miserably there, buried with all his men and his yaks under a tremendous avalanche. That accident cost me more than two hundred cases of the finest tea."

"Yes," resumed the Tartar, "I have myself experienced the terrible avalanches of the Nila pass. On my last passage, two of my men, having lost their way, were found next day frozen to death. The cold is always intense on those heights, and you will do well to provide yourselves with warm clothes and furs, such as our mountaineers wear, for the passage. 'Tis true that when you are once on the other side the pass, you will descend into the valley of Bissahir, through which the Sutledj rolls its rapid waters, and which is one of the finest countries in the world."

The two merchants, not content with furnishing our friends with this information, insisted on equipping them for the journey. The generous Tin-to gave them each a fur overcoat and a goat-skin cap. Besides this, he invited them to dine with him that same evening, and thus gave them an opportunity of reinstating themselves in his friends' esteem by relating some of their adventures. André even condescended to give an interesting perform-

ance with Saprani, which delighted the Thibetians beyond measure.

They did not break up their party till late in the evening, and the young Frenchman, in further acknowledgment of Tin-to's kindness, gave him a short letter of introduction to the Governor.

The following morning Mali and his companions left Mussourie, and entered the picturesque valley of Dérali. The road was merely a narrow path running along the crest of a mountain, overhanging the river, which, rushing swiftly over rocks, forms endless charming cascades. Now and then the steepness of the mountain side caused the road to cross and recross the river, which was spanned by ingenious bridges of creepers made by Himalayan mountaineers.

When André, for the first time, set foot on these frail structures, he could not help expressing his misgivings; but Mali very quickly reassured him by explaining that these slender bridges were capable of beating eight or ten men heavily laden. In mode of construction they differ very little from our iron suspension-bridges. The platform, made of bamboos placed cross-ways, is supported by enormous cables of plaited creepers, and by a net-work of small cords, which, whilst allowing great elasticity, insure its solidity.

We will say but little of the beauty of the country through which our travellers passed, for it would take whole pages to attempt to describe its manifold wonders. How can one give an idea of the sublime splendour of

these Himalayan valleys, where, at a single glance, the eye wanders over every zone of vegetation? Whilst the lower parts are crowded with palm-trees, ferns, and all the luxuriance of tropical flora, the first slopes are clothed with a dark, verdant mantle of ancient cedars, mingling higher up with dazzling clumps of rhododendrons. Higher still, the eye rests upon woods of birch and stunted oak, the last zone above which begins the dazzling whiteness of the everlasting snow. Cool streams wind in all directions, falling in cascades, and overflowing in flower-decked basins. After the gloomy region of the Térai this indeed is the land of perpetual spring—an earthly paradise.

That which further enhanced the beauty of the country in our travellers' eyes was the feeling of security which they experienced as they went along. No more need to walk in darkness or to hide themselves from all human eyes as hitherto. The few peasants they met on their way greeted them cheerily, and at the first village they entered they were kindly received and provided with food and shelter.

After a two days' march, the aspect of the country changed considerably: the trees were few and far apart; the road, rough and steep, wound alongside great precipices, and the mountain of Nila with its glaciers seemed so near that the travellers were continually fancying they were at their journey's end. But after one summit was gained there came another more difficult still to ascend; and for three days yet our travellers climbed on with no

other shelter at night than the bare rock, or perchance a charcoal-burner's abandoned hut.

On the seventh day after their rough journey, they came in sight of Dérali, ensconced in a hollow of the rocks, and surrounded by dazzling glaciers. A few hours later they entered the village, and stopped before the house of a lama, to whom they had been directed by the good Tin-to.

The Buddhist priest gave them a warm welcome, and entertained them at his house,—a kind of immense chalet, which reminded one of Switzerland rather than India. Everything around them was new to the travellers: the houses built of wood with carved balconies ; the inhabitants clothed in furs ; and even the animals, the shaggy-haired dogs, and the enormous yaks.

" One would think we were already in China," said André to his companions, " and it is as cold as in Europe."

Thus at nightfall our friends gladly accepted their host's invitation to lie down on the immense casement of a stove in which a good cedar fire was steadily burning.

The following day they went through the village, guided by the venerable lama, and, thanks to his assistance, they succeeded in engaging two guides, and hiring a couple of yaks for the journey through the pass. After having made this arrangement, they were preparing to start at once, but the lama advised them to take a little rest.

" You will soon need all your strength," said he to them.

" Ah ! " proudly exclaimed Miana, " you must know, my good sir, that a few days of a forced march does not alarm

us. We have known many of them; and the day when the Métchis were in pursuit of us, I assure you, we rolled down the mountain as fast as your barrels of wine could have done. If Mali and André will take my advice, they will start at once. Ever since I have been wrapped up in furs from head to foot like a bear, I have been longing to roll in the white snow, which we have seen for so long, but which I have never in my life set foot on."

"Take care that the white snow does not play you any trick," said the lama, laughing. "We, who are every day obliged to dispute for our existence with it, could do very well without it. Believe me, my good friends, you will do well to take my advice. Here you are but twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea; but you have to cross the Nila, which is seventeen thousand feet—"

"Seventeen thousand feet!" interrupted André; "why, that is ever so much higher than the highest mountain in Europe—Mount Blanc. When we have crossed over yonder the Alpine Club might as well nominate us honorary members."

"——Seventeen thousand feet," continued the lama impassively, for he had not comprehended the meaning of this interruption; "and you must know that at this height our brave mountaineers can scarcely stand upright, they are so much weakened by the want of air. However, you will be obliged to pass the night up there, and walk on for some time in that altitude before you make any descent. Take good care to cover your faces with veils, if you do not want tobe blinded, and wrap yourselves up well with linen so that

the blood does not issue from your pores. It is under these conditions alone that you will reach Punderpoor safe and sound."

"The old fogy!" said Miana disrespectfully in an undertone to André.

"In any case," replied the young Frenchman, "we must do as he tells us, for if we refuse, the guides he has found us may withdraw their services."

The weather was bitterly cold, when, the following morning, our three friends left the lama's warm house and started on their journey. Mali, taking the baggage, rode one of the yaks, whilst the two young people and Hanouman mounted the other.

"Above all, do not forget to make tea up yonder!" shouted their host after them, when they had already begun the ascent.

"Very good," replied Miana. "If he thinks," continued he, "that I am going to drink his medicine, he is very much mistaken,—even Hanouman will not touch it. Once the doctor made me take some tea, and I almost died after it."

"Or rather," said André, "you almost died of your illness, notwithstanding the tea; which is not quite the same thing."

They had scarcely left the village when they came to the glacier, which, in crumbling away, formed numerous streams, bounding and leaping merrily down the mountain side, till they formed the Matchli-Nadi. The yaks jogged skilfully through the blocks over the slippery ground, and jumped the brooks with an agility which one would have

hardly expected from their heavy build. The ground being still fairly level, they soon broke into a trot, urged on by the guides.

Miana, holding on to André, was delighted with this ride, though the pace of their steed was anything but easy.

"Châvach!" cried he, "this is what I call travelling. I have always promised myself that if ever I became a paladin, like those in the legends, I would ride all over the world on a black horse. I would go from city to city, and defy traitors like Nana Sahib to fight me, and then I would run them through with my lance. Afterwards, I would deliver the princesses they have shut up in their towers; for princesses are always shut up in a great round tower—"

"Or a square one," said André, laughing.

"Or a square one," continued Miana. "You will see we shall find Miss Bertha imprisoned in a tower."

"Confound you, you young chatterbox," said Mali. "Ever since this young beggar has felt a coat on his back he fancies himself a lord. It is very fortunate for us that those two men can understand hardly anything but Pahari, for if they knew our language, our secrets would soon be spread all over the country."

"True," replied Miana, with self-possession; "but I knew as well as you that these people could not understand me. And it feels so nice to be able to speak, and shout out as much as one likes without some spy poking his nose in one's face, or a tiger showing his muzzle to make one serious again."

"We have no spies to fear here," replied Mali; "but I was told at Mussourie that tigers are to be found even on the glaciers, where they go in pursuit of goats and wild sheep."

In proportion as the travellers mounted higher, the immense panorama grew wider and more magnificent. Their view now embraced the wooded mountains they had traversed on leaving Mussourie, and far away beyond these they could see the dark forest of the Térai and the valley of the Ganges, whilst above their heads rose giant peaks, the very summits of the world, in the midst of which was throned the sublime Kailas, the majestic Brahmin Olympus, which, from its towering height, must look down disdainfully on the Greek Olympus.

"How beautiful and grand it all is!" involuntarily exclaimed André, who was gazing with a kind of awe on this incomparable spectacle.

"Yes," said Mali; "the Creator has been pleased to give us a glimpse of His omnipotence. What is man beside those celestial thrones, which his eye can contemplate, but which his foot may never tread?"

"And why may not the foot of man ever tread the summit of the Kaïlas?" exclaimed the sceptical Miana. "If it were our road, we should soon be up there; we are ascending the Nila easily enough."

"No, my poor Miana," said André, "neither we nor any one else could ascend to such heights. The learned men of Europe have invented engines which they call balloons, and by means of which they go up in the air like birds; but

never have they been able to mount as high as the Kaïlas. One day, a Mr. Glaisher, more adventurous than the rest, allowed his balloon to ascend twenty-two thousand feet, but after that the air became so rarified that he lost consciousness. And yet he was then three thousand feet below the summit of the mountain you see there."

This allusion which André made to our balloons greatly excited the curiosity of his companions, and he was obliged to try and explain the wonderful invention to them.

Whilst conversing thus the travellers had come half way to the pass, the deep depression of which they could now see shut in between two more elevated peaks. The guides asked leave to take a little rest, for they were about to enter upon the most dangerous part of their journey. A fire was quickly lighted, and one of the Paharis having put on the *Samovar*, which mountaineers always take with them, the tea was soon ready, and each one took a cup of the fragrant infusion with his simple meal. Even Miana, though with a wry face, acknowledged that the warm beverage seemed to take the numbness out of his limbs, which were beginning to feel frozen, notwithstanding the furs.

The meal over, the riders again mounted their steeds and set out. They could only get along very slowly now. The guides went on a few steps ahead of the yaks, sounding the snow with their long staffs in order to avoid any crevices.

After two hours of this kind of travelling, without any serious accident occurring, they came to the entrance of a

long, narrow passage, with a steep incline,—what the Alpinists call a *chimney*. The guides stood still and began to deliberate; then one of them went up to Mali, who understood Pahari a little, and said to him,—

"Venerable master, we are now at the entrance of the most terrible defile in the whole mountain of Nila. When once this pass is crossed we shall have finished our work; but Buddha only knows if to-night's moon will find us alive. Countless are the victims who lie buried in that cold abyss. You see the enormous blocks of ice overhanging the sides of the mountain; the least shock, the least noise is enough to shake them down on the unfortunate travellers below. If you are brave enough, if you can, whatever may be the horror of the danger, remain without uttering a cry, without proffering a word, follow us, and, with the aid of the Almighty, we shall be able to pass."

"Lead on, we will follow you," replied Mali. But first of all he interpreted the guide's words to his companions, and he especially enjoined the most absolute silence on the irrepressible Miana.

Soon the little band had entered the terrible pass of the Nila. This narrow defile, the Indian name of which signifies *azure blue*, is an immense fissure of glaciers. Its sides of pure ice gleam with a brilliant azure tint. A singular circumstance with regard to this pass, in which the blocks of ice overhanging it are continually thawing, is, that it is always practicable; at least, for centuries it has served as the road of communication between India and Thibet.

André and his companions advanced silently, dumb with fear, and half frozen by the cutting wind which swept through the passage. Even the yaks stepped cautiously, which showed their appreciation of the danger.

The passage through the defile took little more than a dozen minutes, but these minutes seemed like long hours to our travellers. At last the yak bearing Mali passed out of the defile. The one carrying the two young men, no doubt more fatigued by the double weight, lagged behind. Without thinking what he was doing, André spurred on his steed into a trot. But scarcely had the noise of its hoofs resounded for an instant, than it was answered by a frightful crash. As though shaken by some mysterious power, the high walls of snow tottered to their base and fell down with a noise of thunder, heaping up the defile with their enormous blocks.

Before Mali and the two guides had time to move, the two young men had disappeared, buried beneath the thick layer of ice and snow. Without losing a moment in vain lamentations, the courageous charmer sprang off the yak, and called out to the guides, who seemed petrified with consternation,—

"Now, quick to work! Let us clear away the snow, and get the lads out of there. They cannot be far under, and perhaps we shall be in time."

"Alas, master!" replied one of the guides, "I greatly fear that we shall only be wasting time and strength for nothing. Your sons must have been crushed beneath the enormous blocks of ice; for, you see, at the spot where

they disappeared, the very side itself of the passage has given way."

"Never mind; dead or alive, I must have my boys," said the charmer, and taking his staff, he began to sweep away the snow with feverish activity.

The Paharis came to his assistance; but as they had foreseen, after working for some minutes they came to an enormous block of ice which lay across the pass. What human being could have lived for a moment beneath that mass! Thus they gave in, disheartened.

Mali, notwithstanding the evidence, still kept on. With his iron-tipped staff he struck the enormous block with all the force of desperation, till the chips flew around him. But after all his trouble, how small was the result!

All at once he stopped, pale and trembling: he seemed to have heard blows answering his. He listened: nothing! The echo, undoubtedly, was mocking him. However, as he was going on with his work, he again heard blows, followed by stifled cries, distant but distinct.

"Mali, Mali! Help, help!"

This time there was no longer any doubt. The guides had heard, and now the three men attacked the block of ice with renewed vigour. Soon, beneath their blows, there was a passage hollowed a few feet wide. The boys' voices could be distinctly heard now.

"Pray be careful!" cried André; "the block which covers us seems to shake at each of your strokes. . . . That's it, I begin to see the light now. You are in the right direction. . . . One more blow."

That last blow, in fact, breaks the slight partition, and André is in the charmer's arms. Before long they are all out in the open air. Neither the young men, nor Hanouman, nor the yak had been in the least injured. By a providential chance, one of the sides of the defile had given way in a solid block, and falling against the opposite wall, had formed an immense cavern, in which the lads found themselves imprisoned.

The confinement had quite benumbed the poor boys' limbs, so the guides hastily lighted a large fire, and they decided to camp for the night at this spot. The water for the tea was soon boiling.

"It is unfortunate, my master," said one of the guides, "that we have been obliged, by this accident, to camp up here. We are still too high up ever to make any good tea."

"How is that," exclaimed Miana, "with a good fire like that?"

"I have often remarked," said the Pahari, "that water at this height boils without being hot: it is impossible for us to cook our meat up here."

"What a tale that is!" said the young Hindoo, impetuously. "Do you take us for imbeciles?"

"He is right, Miana," said André. "I should never have thought it, but the degree for boiling water gets lower in proportion as one goes higher; whilst by the seaside, water boils or evaporates at 100°, at a height of 3000 feet it takes no more than 96°, and so on. This phenomenon is even made use of in measuring the height of mountains. We are

here almost 15,000 feet above the level of the sea: the water boils then at about 80°, and this temperature is, in fact, insufficient to cook meat, and especially to make good tea."

However, good or bad, the tea was soon ready, and they each drank a large cupful, accompanied with a dry biscuit. Then, after this frugal meal, the travellers rolled themselves round in their furs near the fire, and fell asleep, worn out by the fatigue and excitement of the day.

They had been told, however, that the night would not pass without its share of dangers. Our travellers had been asleep for some hours, when they were awakened by a terrible uproar. The mountains re-echoed with frightful roars and bellowing. Mali and his companions knew not what to think of it, when one of the Paharis exclaimed, "The tigers are attacking our yaks!" and without a moment's hesitation he rushed towards the scene of the struggle, undoubtedly to try and save the poor animals.

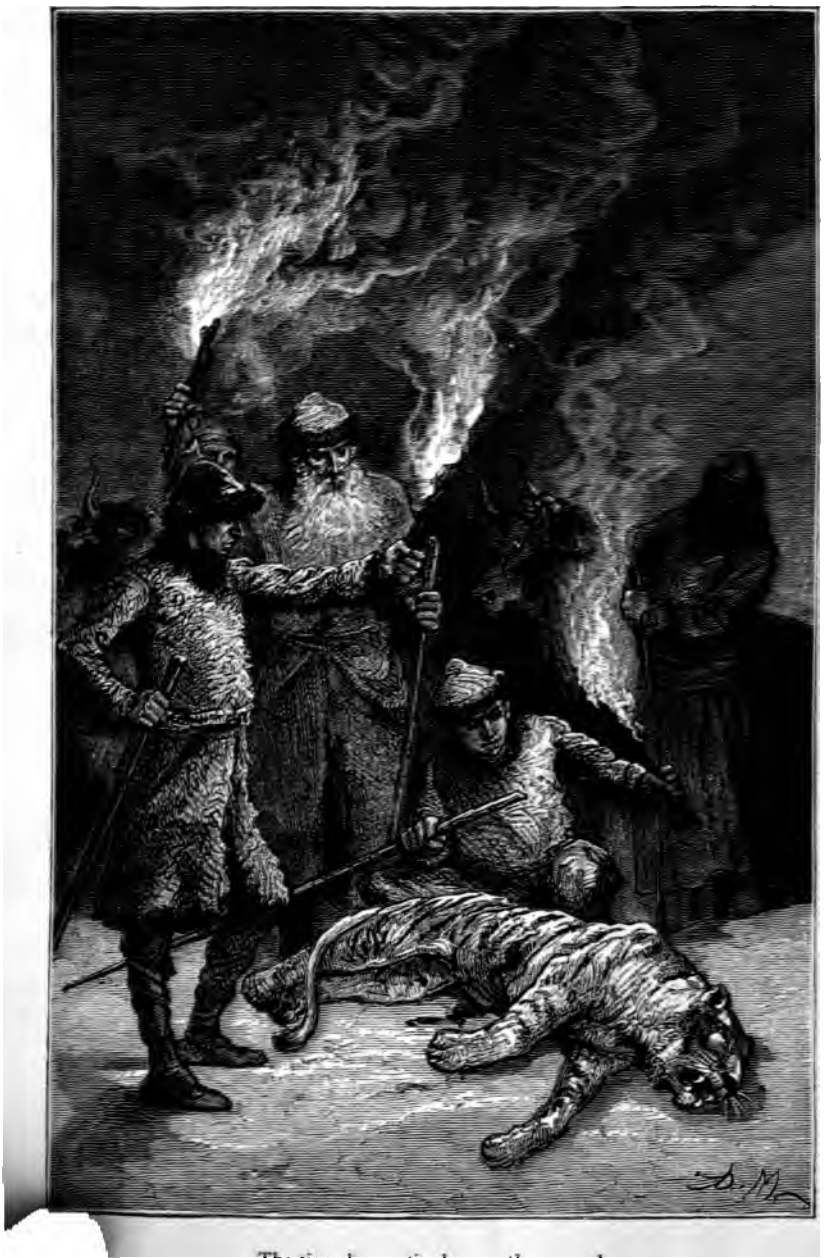
His companions quickly followed him. The charmers stood still for a moment, then, taking Mali's advice, they armed themselves with long, flaming firebrands, and in their turn ran towards the yaks.

During the night, after having rested themselves, the yaks must have wandered from the protection of the fire to graze on the scanty lichens growing on the ice-covered rocks. Unfortunately, a tiger had surprised them at this meagre feast, and sprung on to them. The brave animals thus attacked ably defended themselves, and standing close together, they presented a line of battle of four pointed

horns, the sight of which made the tiger roar with rage. How long this resistance would have lasted, and what would have been the result of the struggle, we do not know. When the charmers' torches lighted the scene, the aspect of things had already changed. The hardy mountaineers, by coming to the help of their yaks, had put the tiger in a difficult position. Gliding through the snow they had cut off his retreat, whilst the yaks kept him at bay in the front. From besieger the tiger had become the besieged, and the arrival of the charmers with their flaming torches completed the circle of investment.

The ferocious beast now looked anxiously round for a way of escape. Suddenly making up his mind, he crouched down flat in the snow, and crawled slowly towards the edge of the plateau. A few bounds and he would be out of the circle. Not one of his enemies stirred. André felt his heart beat at this sight; if he had only had his good gun, the tiger should not have gone very far. But in their position would it not be better to let the enemy fly in peace?

Such was not the opinion of the mountaineers. When the tiger had crawled a dozen yards, they both sprang up, shouting and brandishing their daggers. At this cry, as though at an arranged signal, the two yaks galloped with lowered heads after the fugitive, and before he had time to turn round, they had rolled him on the ground, and pierced him with their horns. The Paharis rushed forward at the same time, and for some minutes there was an indescribable mêlée. The charmers, by the light of their torches, could



The tiger lay motionless on the ground.

Page 209.

distinguish nothing but an enormous black mass, writhing and rolling on the snow. They were anxiously wondering what was the fate of their guides, when a cry of triumph was heard, and one of the Paharis shouted to them,—

"You can come, masters; he is dead."

Our friends were very quickly on the spot. The tiger lay motionless on the ground, and the mountaineers with difficulty prevented their yaks from tearing its carcase with their horns.

André uttered an exclamation of surprise as he examined the wild beast by the light of the torch.

"Just look," he cried, "it is quite white. A white tiger!"

"Yes, indeed, my lord," said one of the mountaineers, "and I can say it is one of the finest I have ever killed. I am certain that Ali Sander, the furrier of the bazaar at Mussourie, will pay me ten rupees for its skin."

"I never knew that there were any of this colour," continued André. "Are all in your mountains like this?"

"No, my lord; we have also black and yellow tigers which come from the Téraï; the white ones come from the high table-lands of Chinese Thibet, but they are not met with here so frequently as the others."

"Allow me to congratulate you," said André, "on the courage of your yaks. I could never have believed that those heavy animals would have had so much spirit."

"Oh, they are used to these fights!" replied the Pahari, "but if we had been long in coming up, they would have ended by taking flight, and the tiger would have killed one of them."

Notwithstanding this explanation, which somewhat detracted from the merit of the yaks, they were patted and praised by our friends; then the body of the tiger was dragged near the fire, and the mountaineers quickly stripped it of its splendid skin. Meanwhile day was breaking; instead of lying down again, the travellers made some more tea, and then the caravan began the descent of the Nila.

After a two hours' march the travellers reached the boundary of the eternal snows. At their feet now lay the valley of the Sutledj, which they could see in the distance winding onward like a wide blue ribbon. This valley, a kind of broad fissure, intersects the Himalayas, and opens a wide road between Thibet and the plains of the Punjaub. Notwithstanding its considerable altitude, for the Sutledj flows through here at a height of six thousand feet above the level of the sea, this country of Bissahir is one of the most charming among the numerous Edens which enamel the slopes of the rampart of the world. Corn and cereals are cultivated here to the very foot of the glaciers, and fruit-trees cover the mountain sides.

Our friends had been walking for some time through a thick wood, when sly Hanouman, leaving his master's shoulder, rapidly climbed one of the trees, and without form or ceremony, began to greedily devour the fruit on its branches.

"What fruit is it?" eagerly asked Miana.

"They are wild apricots, if I am not mistaken," replied André.

"You are right," said Mali. "The apricots of Bissahir are

considered the best in the world. After being dried, they are sent to all parts of India, where this fruit is unknown."

Miana asked for no further explanation: he was quickly off the yak, and undoubtedly not wishing to disturb Hanouman, he chose another tree, and quickly climbed it.

His companions, leaving him to satisfy his appetite, continued their way, when they were stopped by loud cries, and turning round, they saw Miana hurriedly descend from the tree, followed by some stranger.

"Well done," said Mali, laughing, "it appears the robber has met with the proprietor, who objects to having his fruit stolen."

In fact, Miana, undoubtedly alarmed at his misdeed, had lost his self-control, and was coming down the mountain slope as fast as his legs would carry him, still pursued by the irascible proprietor. However, the latter gentleman, probably seeing that his efforts were useless, stopped for a moment, then, putting his head between his legs and making himself into a ball, he let himself roll down the slope, without troubling himself further about the young man, who flew towards his friends.

On seeing this comical manœuvre the mountaineers cried out, laughing, "It is only a bear, trying to frighten Master Miana."

Miana came up, breathless, and in his turn shouted, "A bear, a bear!" But his comical fright only excited his companions' mirth the more, who well knew how harmless these small bears of the Himalayas are.

"Console thyself," said André, "thou hast frightened him finely, if one may judge from the way he is making off. Thou shouldst have followed Hanouman, who is not the monkey to run into such dangers."

At the foot of the mountain the travellers found themselves at a village, where they took leave of the good Paharis, and also, much to Miana's regret, of the two yaks.

"In two hours' time you will be at Punderpoor," cried one of the mountaineers as he left them. "May Buddha protect you."

"Yes, may God protect us," added André, "for we are about to play our last part."

"Mali waved his staff."

CHAPTER XVI.

ANDRÉ'S PLAN.

AFTER a two hours' march across a lovely country enriched with beautiful gardens, the three travellers came to Punderpoor. The city rises in the shape of an amphithcatre, and its base is washed by the waters of the swift-flowing Sutledj. On either side a rocky promontory rears its perpendicular walls above the river. An embattlement, in the form of a horse-shoe, runs round the city on the mountain side, and is terminated at either end by a citadel, each crowning the heights. The larger of these citadels encloses the palace, whose lofty façades of pink sandstone, and

numerous gilded turrets, overlook the whole country round.

"That is where my poor sister is," exclaimed André, as he gazed on this fairylike spectacle. "How high those walls are! The gaoler has well chosen his prison, and I am wondering how we can ever hope to open its doors."

"Mahadeo will help us," said Mali. "What dangers have we not surmounted with his aid ever since the day the treacherous Nana set fire to Gandapoor? Rama will still uphold us if we do not let our courage fail. We are at our journey's end; that is a great point gained. And now prudence, and let each of us bear well in mind the part he must play."

The travellers had reached the city. It was still broad daylight, and directly they passed through the gates they found the bazaar filled with crowds of country-people flocking to and fro, making purchases, or selling goods. Mali walked in front, carrying his red staff and toumril. André and Miana followed with the serpent-baskets, whilst Hanouman, scared by the crowd, kept prudently between them.

At sight of the little band, merchants and purchasers left off their discussions, and soon our friends were surrounded by a crowd of inquisitive people.

Without being in the least disconcerted, Mali continued his way through the bazaar, glancing at the names on the shop-fronts. At last, coming to an oil merchant's stall, he waved his staff with an imperious gesture, and the crowd

having parted, he went up to the counter, behind which sat a venerable Hindoo.

"Salam Goussaïn," said the charmer to the merchant, "I come to beg hospitality for myself and sons in the name of our friend Tin-to."

At this name the merchant got up quickly, and leaving his shop, went out to meet the travellers.

"May Brahma grant long life to the good Tin-to," said he. "His friends are my friends, his guests are mine. Enter, and be welcome." Then turning towards the crowd, "Go, my friends," said he to them, "these strangers are my fellow-countrymen; I will inform the *tannadar* of their arrival."

The kind Goussaïn re-entered his shop after the charmers, and having led them into an inner room, he said to them,—

"You must know that his Highness the Maharajah has recently given strict orders that no stranger coming from English territories shall be allowed to enter the city. I cannot understand how it is the guards allowed you to come through the gates, but I shall have to answer for your presence to the *tannadar*, the commandant of the garrison. You need not be alarmed, my friends. Tin-to did well in sending you to me; you may rely on my protection."

"I am much obliged to you for your kindness," replied Mali, "but we will only make use of your hospitality for this evening, and you will soon be relieved of your respon-

sibility. To-morrow we think of going to see the high-priest at the royal pagoda—"

"Do you speak of the high and mighty Mahadji, the priest of Kali, and uncle of his Highness?"

"Precisely so," said the charmer. "I have an important message for Mahadji, and it is only for fear of disturbing his Highness at this hour of the day, that I have come first of all to you."

The truth was, Mali had thought it well to gather some reliable information before putting into practice André's plan, and seeking the protection of the high-priest, which was, perhaps, like throwing themselves into the wolf's jaws. Fortunately the good Goussaïn's curiosity was excited; the whole evening he plied his guests with numerous questions, and his artless questioning told them more than the most skilful inquiries would have done.

It was thus André learnt that his sister, here called the Doulân Sircar, was living with the queen-mother in the palace of the Eklingarh Citadel, and that she never went out without a numerous escort. Lastly, he heard that the Indian officer, Captain Doda, who had brought the princess here, was about to leave Punderpoor to rejoin the army of Nana Sahib, of whom they had had no news for two months. André was thankful to hear of the captain's departure, for the presence of Doda would have frustrated all his plans.

The following morning, having decked themselves in holiday garb, the three charmers, guided by Goussaïn, went to the house of the high-priest in the upper part of the town. The long wings of this noble mansion, with their

marble galleries, enclosed the sumptuous royal pagoda. The temple itself towered up from the summit of a stupendous flight of stone steps, which descended majestically down to the brink of the river.

The courtyard of the pontifical residence was filled with fakirs, Brahmins, and servants, who received the charmers with no less curiosity than the crowd on the preceding evening; but as soon as the rumour spread that the strangers wished to see the high-priest, curiosity changed into respectful and assiduous attention. A servant was despatched to acquaint the mighty Mahadji of the presence of the visitors, and in a few moments he returned with the command to admit the strangers.

The high-priest was in a large, sumptuously decorated room; he was sitting on a kind of velvet throne, surrounded by a circle of Brahmins. On seeing the travellers enter the room, annoyed undoubtedly by their shabby appearance, he frowned, and exclaimed angrily,—

"What do those beggars want of me?"

"The wise man speaks slowly," replied Mali, bowing with dignity, "and does not thus run the risk of despising his most devoted friends. Across forests and mountains, in spite of wild beasts and savages, braving sun and snow, are we come unto thee. But be it so! Since our presence is displeasing to thee, we go;" and again bowing, the charmer moved towards the door, followed by his two companions.

"Stay," said Mahadji eagerly, "and forgive me. To err is human, and not till he has passed through thirty

thousand existences, can man attain perfection. Who are you?"

"I am Mali, the famous *Nât*, the great conjurer, the infallible doctor—he who has trained Nana Sahib, and made him the man he is. This youth is Miana, my servant; Vichnu has taught him to talk with monkeys, the companions of Rama, and to understand their language That young man there is Andhra, my beloved son. To look at him, wouldst thou not think thou wert beholding Krichna himself? He has beauty, blue eyes, and a supple white body; he has power, for his incantations make tigers tremble, serpents crawl on the ground, and stone idols to cry out. He is my son, and I am his servant; it is he who has come to thee, and who is about to speak with thee."

"Mahadji," then said André, "it is Kali who speaks by my mouth; when I was officiating before her idol at Nandapoor, she cried out, 'Andhra, go, cross the mountains and snow, and say to Mahadji that my anger is great, and that my vengeance is kindling against him. It is in vain he worships before my image, and covers my altars with the blood of his victims. A woman, a princess of his blood, the betrothed of his nephew, defies me, and refuses to prostrate herself before my holy altars. If before the moon of Astar this princess has not been brought before my idol, and has not been present at a solemn poudja, the weight of my wrath shall fall upon Mahadji.' I understood not the meaning of these words, my lord, but I at once set out, and here I am."

"I am Mali, the famous Nât."

Page 218.

"But," exclaimed the high priest, trembling with fear, "what is there to prove to me that thou art not an impostor, sent perhaps by our enemies?"

"This," said André, presenting the ring which the Pontiff of Nandapoor had given him.

"The ring of Soumrou, the favoured priest of Kali!" exclaimed Mahadji, and turning to the circle of men around him, "Brahmins," said he, "prostrate yourselves, for these strangers are the messengers of the good goddess!"

All the Brahmins prostrated themselves before André, who continued his discourse in these words:—

"O great Mahadji, and you, venerable Brahmins, in me you see but the humble slave of mighty Kali; I thank you in her name for the honour you have done me. You may rely upon my giving my most zealous assistance in the coming ceremony."

"We rely upon you, noble Andhra," said the high priest, "and orders shall to-day be given for you and your companions to be lodged near the sanctuary."

The same day heralds went through the town, proclaiming to the people that on the tenth day before the moon of Astar, that is to say, five days later, the high-priest, Mahadji, assisted by three fakirs from India, would celebrate a solemn poudja, in honour of the goddess Kali. Order was given, under pain of death, to all the inhabitants, of whatever rank or sect, to be present at the poudja.

André and his companions, thus placed under the immediate protection of the high priest, could henceforth go where they liked in the town, without exciting any

suspicion. On the contrary, the crowd, now aware of their sacred character, treated them everywhere with marks of respect.

The conspirators had resolved to carefully collect all information necessary for the execution of their plan, thus they endeavoured to prepare the ground on all sides, and for this purpose each went his own way. Whilst Mali, who had loudly sung his talents as a physician, was admitted to the presence of the king, Miana, with his monkey, went through that part of the city near the citadel. As for André, he reserved to himself the river and its banks. Only in the evening did the three friends meet in the temple of Kali, and there talk over the results of their day's work.

All seemed to be going on well, though it was impossible to foresee the result. The evening before the day appointed for the poudja, the conspirators thus enumerated their chances of success,—

"I have this very day seen his Highness," said Mali; "I have learnt from one of his courtiers that the princess Doulan Sircar, your sister, positively refuses to be present at the poudja of Kali, but that the king intends to compel her to go by force if necessary. Truly, my dear Andhra, you have planned a very cruel way of seeing your sister, and, as for me—"

"Ah! don't you know," interrupted André, "that I could not make up my mind to use this horrible violence until you yourself agreed that all other means were impossible? Did not Goussaïn tell us the first thing that Bertha

never left the palace without an escort of infidel Thibetians who cannot enter your temples? Did he not also say that since the arrival of my sister, no man, under pain of death, can ever cross the threshold of the queen-mother's palace? Thus there was no room for hesitation. I thought of bringing Bertha to this temple, where she will have no other guards than a crowd of easily duped servants. Whilst pretending to be uttering incantations, I will speak to her in French and tell her to take refuge in the sanctuary of Kali. Whilst the people, believing in the conversion of the princess, will think a miracle is being worked, we will all four go out by the secret door which looks towards the river: there a boat will be waiting for us, brought by a man whom I have bribed, without giving him a suspicion of our plans. We are flying, and are already far away, whilst the crowd is still prostrate before Kali, waiting for our reappearance."

"Yes, that is all very good," said Mali gently, "but suppose they pursue us?"

"Should they pursue us, the fire-arms which I have bought and placed in the boat, will allow us to defend ourselves. If we are obliged to give in, better far an instant and glorious death for us all, than a long life of shame and infamy."

"Well spoken, Andhra!" exclaimed Miana. "I can almost fancy I see ourselves on the Sutledj, firing on the troops of his Highness, and cutting them to pieces."

"With gun-shots?" said Mali, smiling. "Come, my lads, your courage sets me at ease, and gives me confidence.

But we have a hard task before us, and a mere trifle may bring our heads beneath the executioner's axe. Are we quite sure about the parts we are to play to-morrow? Let us see; thou, Miana, thou must—is it not so?—thou must place thyself behind the idol—"

"And directly Andhra has given the signal," replied the young Hindoo, "I shall cry in a shrill voice, 'Let the Doulân Sircar come and prostrate herself in my sanctuary.'"

"Very good," replied the charmer: "and you, Andhra?"

"Oh, I know my part," said the young man, "never fear! If at Nandapoor I hesitated at first to play what I considered a contemptible comedy, it was because only my own life was at stake. But now that it is a question of my sister's life, of her deliverance, and of the honour of my name, I no longer hesitate, well knowing that God, who sees the depth of my heart, will forgive my conduct."

At sunrise the next day the gigantic nakaras of the royal pagoda resounded through the valley, and ere long the streets were filled with gay crowds of people in holiday dress, coming from all parts, to be present at the great solemnity.

The curiosity was general, for it was known that the Hindoo fakirs, who were to play the principal part in the poudja, had come from the other side of the Térar and the Himalayas, sent by the high priest Soumrou. Thus, although the ceremony was not to take place until nightfall, the whole day a compact crowd thronged round the temple, in order not to lose any sight of the preparations for

the great performance. Many of the country people and citizens took advantage of this circumstance to prostrate themselves before the Red Goddess, for notwithstanding the vast proportions of the sanctuary, it was probable that room would be very scarce. Others hoped they would be able to see the Nâts, but their hopes were disappointed; neither André nor his companions would show themselves.

The day did not seem too long to the conspirators to finish their preparations. André and Mali carefully adjusted the disguises they were to make use of in order that Bertha should not recognize them all at once, and that her surprise should not be too marked on seeing them. They diligently repeated one by one all the parts of the drama.

Two hours before sunset, persons of high rank, nobles, and chiefs of castes, began to arrive at the temple, to take their places before the arrival of the king. Before long a cannon fired from the Eklingarh citadel announced that the royal procession had started, and a few minutes later the Thibetian guards, running in advance, cleared a way through the crowd with their halberds.

First of all came several elephants, carrying members of the royal family; then his Highness in person appeared, mounted on a gigantic elephant, glittering with precious stones and cloth of gold; at his side, on a velvet throne, sat a young girl with fair hair, gazing sadly, with eyes red with weeping, on the prostrate crowds.

When the royal elephant, crouching down at the foot of

the flight of steps, had allowed the king and princess to alight, and they began to ascend the steps leading up to the temple, the people, transported with admiration at this sight, filled the air with loud acclamations. An ideal fairy-like picture indeed was that of the fair angelic young girl, glittering with jewels and rich embroideries, slowly ascending the great flight of steps, leaning on the arm of the king, a fine old man with a long majestic white beard. The last rays of the setting sun cast a lurid, purple glow over the group and transfigured it with weird loveliness.

At the top of the steps on the threshold of the temple, stood the high-priest, Mahadji. After having bowed to the king, "My daughter," said he to Bertha, "be comforted. Only the enemies of Kali tremble before her."

"You well know," replied the young girl with gentle dignity, "that I tremble before none of your idols."

"We shall soon see," muttered the priest. And they entered the temple.

The vast edifice was thronged with people. Notwithstanding her courage, Bertha felt her heart beat wildly as she passed through the gloomy portals, adorned with grimacing monsters, and saw the horrible idol, with its hundred arms, and all the mysterious preparations for the sacrifice. The poor girl wondered what part her tormentors had reserved for her in this dark ceremony; and calling to mind the blessed Christian martyrs, she determined to die rather than abjure her faith. Guided by the king, she took her place in the front row of the as-

They began to ascend the steps.

Page 224.

sembly on a golden throne. Then at a sign from Maḥadji the ceremony began.

Night had suddenly fallen black and dense, and the lamps placed before the altar and round the temple gave but a dim light.

Directly Bertha set foot in the temple, André had watched her every movement. Hidden behind the body of the idol, he gazed upon the young girl with intense joy, whilst the choir was singing the praises of Kali the immutable destroyer. Yes, it was indeed Bertha! His heart had not deceived him, she was there before him; he clutched hold of the bronze arm of the idol to prevent himself from rushing towards his sister and telling her he was near her, and pressing her to his heart, even before all the congregation.

Mali, with unchanged countenance, stood near the young man to prevent any imprudent action on his part.

"Now, Andhra," said he all at once, "now is the time. The choir is chanting the last *sloka*, we must go forward. Take Sâprani, and remember."

"Yes, true," murmured the young man; and gently taking the good cobra in his arms, with a firm step he left the sanctuary. Suddenly he appeared before the altar, followed by Mali, brandishing a serpent in each hand.

At sight of the charmers the congregation uttered enthusiastic cries and threw a shower of flowers towards the altar in token of approval.

André, whose face was well covered with a thick coat of red paint, which made him quite unrecognizable, raised

his arms, with one hand extending his gold wand over the congregation, and with the other brandishing the good Sâprani. There was immediate silence. The young man turned slowly towards the idol, whose arms, entwined with living serpents, seemed suddenly to move at his command. Then he slowly began to chant a hymn to Kali, which his two companions repeated in an undertone for him.

Bertha, notwithstanding her terror, which was increased by the sight of the serpents, felt herself irresistibly attracted by the young man; breathlessly and unconsciously she followed his slightest movements, and listened to each of his words. All at once—strange and terrible illusion! —it seemed to her that the young man on finishing his verse said in French, "Bertha, listen!" But no, it was not possible! And the poor child, with increased terror, wondered whether her reason was giving way.

Now it was the old man's turn. Bertha heard his words without being able in her confused state of mind to seize their meaning; but the word "Mali," pronounced at the end of the *sloka*, seemed suddenly to enlighten her. She looked attentively at the fakir, and soon recognized old Mali, her *protégé* at Gandapoor. But what matter! He who was then a friend is now an enemy; did not his presence in this temple prove it?

Again the young charmer begins his chant, and his clear voice thrills through the prisoner's heart.

With unchanged countenance he slowly intones a *sloka* which ends thus:—

"Shri Déva Kali, Mérou ka Rani!
Shri Dourga Dévi, Maha Ganga hêli!"[1]
Bertha, it is I, it is André!"

This time the young girl has heard too well; she understands all, and her emotion is so great she cannot conceal it; her heart is bursting. She rises, stretches out her arms, and uttering this piercing cry, which echoes through the vaulted roof, "André! André!" she falls unconscious in the arms of the high-priest and the king.

The tumult is very great; the crowds believe it is a miracle, and press round the young princess, who is carried out of the temple still unconscious. The congregation leave, and soon the temple is deserted, most fortunately for our friends, for André, mad with grief at seeing his plan baffled, is struggling between his two companions who have much difficulty in holding him, to prevent him from rushing after his sister.

"God has punished me for this impious comedy!" moaned André.

"For mercy's sake hold your tongue," said Mali, "if you would not lose everything."

"But all is lost."

"By no means,—far from that. You have wrought a miracle in the eyes of the people. Are you not the sectary of Kali? By calling on your name publicly the princess has but bowed to the command of the goddess. Your

1 Glory to thee, Goddess Kali, Queen of Paradise. Glory to thee Goddess of Death, daughter of the sacred Ganges.

power cannot but be increased, and we shall soon find another favourable opportunity.

"Yes, certainly," said Miana; "I have already thought of a plan which is simply infallible."

These words could not console André; but his tears flowed now in silence. Suddenly hurried steps were heard in the temple, and a servant from the palace came towards the sanctuary.

"Holy men," said he, "who among you bears the name of Mali?"

"I do," said the old charmer.

"In that case will you follow me without delay to the palace? Such is the command of his Highness."

"And what does the king want with me?" asked Mali.

"As you know, the Princess Doulân Sircar, struck by the good goddess, was carried insensible to the palace. The king's physician has attended her, and thanks to his care she has recovered consciousness, or, at least, she has opened her eyes, for waving away the doctor and her women, she refuses all assistance, and contents herself by repeating mechanically, 'Mali! André!' The king, fearing that this state of things may continue, has obtained authority from the queen-mother, considering your great age, for you to enter the *zenanah*,[2] and he hopes that your presence may calm the young lady."

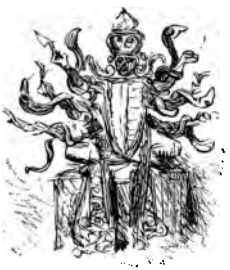
"Very good," eagerly replied Mali; "I hasten to obey

[2] The *zenanah* is the gynecium of Hindoo palaces, the apartment reserved for women, to which men are forbidden access.

the king's summons. Go and announce my arrival: I will follow you."

Scarcely had the servant gone, when the old man said to his companions,—

"You see, Andhra, Heaven does not abandon us! I am going to the palace, and in an hour I shall bring you back word what your sister may say to me; but till then, neither of you must leave the temple. Your safety depends upon your remaining here."



"Two guards of the seraglio took me by the arms."

CHAPTER XVII.

ESCAPE.

How long and interminable that night seemed to poor André! For the first hour, notwithstanding his great anxiety, he waited patiently for Mali's return; but as the time wore on he began to pace the long aisles of the temple with feverish activity. The old man before starting had made him promise that whatever happened he would not during the night cross the threshold of the pagoda; and André, faithful to his promise, stopped just at the limit of the temple porch. Every hour that passed increased his anguish; unable to endure the suspense any longer, he

went and sat down on the top step of the flight. At his feet lay the sleeping town, with its terraces rising one above the other in the cavity of the amphitheatre. Heedless of this spectacle, André's eyes were fixed on the palace, which loomed up dark against the starry sky. One after another the gongs tolled out the hours; then the stars began to wane and put out their lights, the sky was streaked with the faint light of dawn, and soon the far-off glaciers gleamed with the purple light of sunrise. And still the charmer came not. What could have delayed him so long? It was very evident that the plot had been discovered, and that all was lost! Thus thought André. Miana, who had come and sat down beside him, was silent,—he, too, was beginning to be fearful.

"Yes, all is lost!" exclaimed the young Frenchman at last; "our confidence has betrayed us, and the spies which the high-priest has not failed to put about us have discovered our plot. Perhaps at this very moment Mali is already atoning by torture for his devotion to my cause, and soon the executioners will come and look for us, even in the temple. But I do not mean to wait for them like a coward. I promised Mali not to go from here all night; but it is day now, and I am free. Since we must perish, come, Miana, let us arm ourselves and run to the palace."

"Surely you do not think of going to the palace?" said the young Hindoo; it would be running into certain death; besides, what could we do there?"

"What could we do there? I mean to slip in, if there is yet time, and stab that infamous king."

"The guards would kill us before we could get near the king," again objected Miana.

"Well, be it so! Since you are afraid," replied André impetuously, "I will go alone."

"I, afraid to follow you?" said the young Hindoo quietly; "I thought I had given you enough proof of the contrary during the last three months."

"True, Miana, forgive me; grief made me forget your devotion for the moment. But what is to be done;"

"You have already decided," replied the *Nât.* "Let us go and avenge Mali, for his fate seems only too evident."

André warmly grasped his hand; then the two young men, wrapped in their cloaks, and armed with daggers, left the temple.

As they reached the top of the steps a man began to ascend them slowly. They uttered the same exclamation on seeing him: it was Mali.

"And where are you going dressed like this?" asked the old man, as soon as he was near them.

"We were going to look for you, and to avenge your death had you perished!"

"Rash youths! Thus a minute later you would have dashed to the ground the scheme I have been so laboriously arranging all night; you would have compromised your life and mine by your folly, and you would have lost your sister for ever."

"But what was I to think," said the young Frenchman, "when you were so long away? I was afraid we were betrayed."

"Let us get back into the temple," simply replied the charmer; "we may be observed. Besides, our time is short, and I have much to tell you."

The young men followed Mali, who went towards the sanctuary, and when they had gone in, the charmer carefully shut the doors.

"We cannot be too cautious," said he. "I am certain that we are suspected, and a word may betray us—"

"Was I not right," interrupted André, "in fearing some treason?"

"It has not gone so far as that yet," said the charmer, quietly; "but as I have a great deal to tell you, I beg you will not interrupt me, for we have not much time.

"On reaching the palace I was at once conducted by a page to the queen's apartments, which occupy all that part of the fortress overlooking the Sutledj. I saw directly how difficult, in fact how impossible, it would have been for a stranger to enter the *zenanah* without permission—"

"But then," exclaimed André involuntarily, "how can we ever hope to get at my sister?"

"Accompanied by my guide," continued Mali, without noticing the interruption, "I passed through the heavy doorway, after having exchanged a password, and found myself in a guard-house filled with armed soldiers. Two guards of the seraglio, taking me by the arms, dragged me through a labyrinth of passages. I went across several courts planted with orange-trees, and at last found myself in a large hall, where there were a great number of ladies. One of them, older than the rest, and whom I recognized

by her gold frontlet as the queen-mother, came towards me and said,—

"'Holy man, the spirit of the goddess Kali, by entering my daughter's mind so suddenly, has troubled the poor child to such a degree that we fear for her reason. Ever since she returned from the temple she has been uttering incomprehensible words in an unknown tongue; we have only been able to make out that she called upon your name and that of your holy companion. Do you think you can calm her and restore her reason?'

"'Princess,' said I to her, 'I will go to the poor child and with my learned exorcisms I hope to restore her to life and reason. The hand of the goddess has fallen heavily upon her, but I have it in my power to prevent any further harm. I simply ask that no one may be present at our interview; it is on that condition alone that I can obtain any satisfactory result.'

"'Be it as you wish,' replied the queen, and taking me by the hand she led me into an apartment adjoining the hall. Bertha, kneeling beside her bed, seemed absorbed in prayer. On hearing our footsteps she turned round and looked at me fixedly, without appearing to recognize me.

"'My daughter,' said the queen to her, 'here is Mali, one of the holy servants of Kali. He has come to cure the evil which torments you. Listen to him and believe in him.'

"So saying she retired and went back to the hall; but I saw that she had left the door open, so that she could watch us.

"Your sister continued to gaze earnestly at me without

Bertha, kneeling beside her bed, seemed absorbed in prayer.

Page 234.

saying a word, and I felt so deeply touched as I looked at her beautiful face, so sad and dejected, that I could not utter a word. At last, summoning my courage, I said to her in an undertone, so as not to be heard outside,—

"'Mademoiselle, you have recognized me; I am Mali, your devoted servant, and I am sent by your brother to save you. But for mercy's sake do not move or make a gesture which may let those who are watching us see that you have recognized me. They must think that I have come to convert you. On these conditions I promise to save you.'

"She remained motionless, as though she had not heard me; then all at once she said quietly,—

"'My good Mali, I indeed recognized you just now, but I was doubtful of you; now I believe in you, for I have seen you with my brother, and I will do all that you tell me. I feel that I made a great mistake in giving way to my first outburst of joy in the temple, but how could I help it? Just when I felt myself condemned to hell, I saw heaven open with life and liberty; I could not control my feelings. Forgive me, you may now rely upon my courage.'

"I then explained to her as quickly as possible what your plan was, and what scheme I had now formed to get her out of her prison. She listened to me as calmly as possible, and assured me that she was ready to attempt anything. Whilst I was talking with her I noticed that the window of her room looked on to the river; I arranged with her that she should do her utmost to be left alone

this evening, and that at midnight she should place a light on her balcony, in order that we might know which was her room. As soon as she should hear a peacock's screech three times, she must put out the light and be ready to join us. I will tell you presently my plan for the escape.

"I talked thus for an hour with your sister, when I saw the queen-mother coming towards us. I had still time to press Bertha's hand to my lips, and when the queen entered, I said,—

"'Princess, thanks to my incantations, your daughter has recovered her spirits. She now blesses the hand that struck her.'

"'Yes,' said Bertha, 'I bow beneath the hand of God, who has never forsaken me.'

"'You see,' added I quickly, 'she thanks Kali.' However, I well knew that her thanks were not addressed to the Red Goddess. 'Leave the young princess to her meditations,' said I to the queen. 'A day of quiet and solitude will complete her cure.'

"I came out of the *zenanah* as I entered it, and was hurrying away to tell you the result of my interview, when one of the officers of the palace, who was undoubtedly awaiting me, told me that the king desired to speak to me.

"Notwithstanding the late hour of the night, the king wished to know at once the result of my interview with your sister. I found him in company with the high-priest, Mahadji, and directly I entered he said to me,—

"'Well, Mali, have you had better success than our doctor and our venerable high-priest?'

"'I know not, sire,' I replied; 'how dare I compare myself with such exalted personages? It is not me whom you must thank for the cure of the princess. My companions and I, in all that has happened, are but the humble and irresponsible instruments of the good goddess.'

"'Then,' said Mahadji, 'has the princess recovered?'

"'Yes; after talking with her for an hour I left her calm, and henceforward submissive to the royal will.'

"'I congratulate you on your success,' said the high-priest. 'The venerable Soumrou has indeed well chosen his emissaries, and he must be anxious to see them back.'

"'I know not,' I replied, 'whether our services are so indispensable to him; but now that our mission is fulfilled, we think of returning in a few days.'

"'His Highness,' continued Mahadji, 'would be sorry to detain you longer, and he has given orders that you may start to-morrow, after a day's rest.'

"I understood that these words were a command evidently dictated by the jealousy of the high-priest, who was afraid that our influence might increase; thus I replied,—

"'We are ready to start any day that his Highness desires.'

"'I have also commanded,' said the king, 'that a purse of gold be given you in token of my gratitude, as well as some rich cloths and shawls, which are for your master, the great Soumrou. I should have been very happy to detain you longer in my capital, but we live in troublous times.

My people are uneasy at your presence, and rumours from the bazaar have reached me. Ill-intentioned people, of that I am certain, say that you are spies sent by the English to injure me, and prevent the marriage of the Princess Doulân Sircar with my son.'

"'These suspicions are an insult to your sacred character,' added Mahadji, 'but it would be better to put an end to them by your departure, for the people are ungrateful and blind.'

"'He whose heart is pure fears not suspicion,' replied I; and I retired after having bowed to the two great personages.

"The result of all this is clear: we must go, and before going we must save your sister."

"But how!" exclaimed André, "in so short a time?"

"Here is my plan," replied the charmer, "and this time it must succeed, for it is our last resource. Your sister's apartment is situated, as I have told you, in that part of the *zenanah* overlooking the river. By a strange presentiment I told Miana a few days ago to inspect that part of the palace enclosure. Thus I know that at this point the bank of the river is formed by a perpendicular rock, fifty feet high, on which stand the very walls of the queen's apartments. This rock, so Miana assures me, is not inaccessible."

"Certainly not," said the young Hindoo, "for I managed to climb it without very much trouble, and I then wondered whether we could not easily enter the fortress from this point, which is not guarded."

"Thus," continued Mali, "we will moor our boat at night at the foot of the rock; one of you will climb the bank and throw a rope to Bertha's window, which your sister will fasten to the balcony, and by which she can let herself down to the rock, and from there to the river. Then when we are all in the boat, we will fly, carried along by the swift current of the Sutledj. The plan is simple; your sister knows it, and is ready to carry it out. Thus we are sure of success. The most important thing is to let this day pass without exciting the suspicion of Mahadji."

"You may rely on me," said André; "I will be as discreet as those stone images, so that you may forget all my foolishness." And throwing himself into the charmer's arms, the young man remained there for some minutes weeping and laughing with joy and happiness.

During the day the charmers received visits from the principal men in the town, who, having learnt the result of the ceremony on the preceding evening, hastened to do obeisance to the mighty ministers of Kali, in order to gain the favour of the good goddess. The ladies of the court also sent them numerous presents. The people outside the temple filled the air with loud acclamations, so that the charmers were obliged to go out on to the steps and show themselves to the enthusiastic crowd. It was very evident that the people, far from being hostile to them, regarded them favourably, and that the rumours which had come to the king's ear had no other source than Mahadji's jealousy.

The high-priest also came to visit Mali and his companions, the king having given him the purse of gold and

the rich stuffs intended for them. The perfidious Brahmin was more obsequious and smooth-spoken than usual, which did not, however, prevent him as he went away from repeating to Mali the order he had received to quit the town the next morning.

"There is one more favour I would beg of your Excellency," said the old charmer; "our stay here has been so short, and the pressure of visitors so great, that we have not yet been able to accomplish our purification in the holy Sutledj. Nevertheless, this sacred river is the brother of the Ganges, since its waters issuing from the Kaïlas have the virtue of purifying the body and soul from all blemish. Will you allow us when the people have left the temple to take advantage of the quietude of the night to go and purify ourselves in the holy water?"

"Be it as you wish," replied the high-priest: "I will order the keeper of the water-gate to allow you access to the river at any hour of the night. But remember that to-morrow at daybreak you must have left Punderpoor."

"To-morrow before sunrise," said Mali, "I swear to you we shall have left Punderpoor for ever."

The visits were prolonged late into the evening, to André's great impatience. At last our three friends found themselves alone, and were able to hurriedly make their last preparations. As it was necessary to take provisions, fire-arms, and rope, without, however, awakening suspicions by too bulky baggages, Mali decided to leave his serpents behind, and he set them at liberty in the sanctuary of Kali.

He could not, however, make up his mind to part with Sâprani, who found a resting-place twined round his body, whilst the cobra's basket and those of its companions were filled with provisions.

Taking the baskets on their shoulders, the three men left the temple. The night was dark, the inhabitants had gone to rest, and the streets were deserted. The charmers quickly passed through the sleeping city, and reached the water-gate without any hindrance.

The officer on guard, informed by Mahadji, was about to allow them to pass, but at the sight of their luggage he could not help expressing his astonishment.

"His Excellency Mahadji," said he, "only told me that you were going on the river to perform your purification. I must warn you that it will be impossible for you to go on your way without returning to the town. The banks of the river are intersected above and below stream by the rocks on which the citadels stand."

"We have no intention of leaving the town just yet," replied Mali. "It is the sight of our baskets which misleads you; but you must know these baskets are filled with serpents which we use in our incantations."

The officer apologized for his mistake, and at once had the gate opened.

"I shall remain here all night," said he to the charmers; "as soon as you want to return, you have only to knock and call me by name: I am Captain Ramdeo."

The three charmers left the town; and plunging into the darkness, they walked along the bank of the river.

"There is the boat," said André in a low tone, pointing to a black form swaying to and fro on the river near the quay. "The boatman has left it moored where I told him. That man was to wait for us here yesterday evening, for I could not think of any good excuse for sending him away: but not seeing us come, he has undoubtedly left his post."

"I hope he has," muttered Mali, "for his own sake; for if he troubles us—"

"A gag in his mouth and in the water!" said Miana energetically.

But the boat was empty. Having drawn it near the quay, the charmers put their baskets in, and took their places. The boat was unmoored, and the two young men, taking the oars, made their little bark glide silently over the water. A quarter of an hour later they stopped at the foot of the rock which, rising perpendicularly from the very bed of the river, supports the citadel of Eklingarh.

"Then, Mali, are you quite sure that Bertha's window overlooks here?" asked André.

"Yes, my lord," replied the old man.

"Well, I don't see any light," continued the young Frenchman.

"Wait!" said Mali.

At that moment the gongs of the city sounded the eight strokes which mark the Hindoo midnight. Instantaneously a feeble ray of light, a scarcely visible beacon, gleamed from the blackness of the citadel. Mali perceived it immediately.

"Now!" said he to André, showing him the flickering light, "that is the signal, your sister is waiting for us."

"Oh, Bertha! Bertha!" exclaimed the young man in an undertone, "may that lamp be the star to lead us to your deliverance."

"Come, my lads," said the charmer, "quick to work, and mind, no noise; I will remain here in the boat whilst you climb the rock."

In a moment the two young men, carrying ropes, began to scale the cliff. The base was less steep and was easily climbed; but at about twenty yards from the ground the rock rose so abruptly that it seemed completely inaccessible; here and there a piece of rock jutting out, or a shrub, formed the only path; moreover, darkness would have deprived the climbers of these advantages, had not Hanouman, Miana's monkey, gone before and guided them with marvellous instinct.

At last, after great difficulty, the two brave lads set foot on the summit of the rock. The wall of the citadel reached almost to the edge, leaving only a narrow ledge of stone a few feet wide. Below this narrow path was the precipice, at the bottom of which flowed the Sutledj; above, the cold, bare, inaccessible wall. But André saw neither precipice nor wall; what he saw was the balcony suspended about a dozen yards above his head, and faintly outlined by the vague light. He would gladly have reached it with a bound.

The two young men uncoiled the ropes; then Miana

having imitated a peacock's screech three times, the light was suddenly extinguished and a dark figure appeared on the balcony. The form leaned forward as though to distinguish from whence came the mysterious signal, and then the word "André!" was uttered in a low voice. It was she, it was Bertha! The young man replied with the same precaution, but in a voice vibrating with emotion, "Bertha, I am here, ready to save you. In a moment you will be free."

Meanwhile Miana had wound the rope as sailors do, and balancing it for a moment in the air, he threw it towards the balcony. The rope sped through the air, but fell down again without Bertha being able to catch it on its way.

André, getting impatient, took the rope from Miana, and tried in his turn, but without any better success. Three fresh attempts proved in vain, and the noise occasioned by each of them threatened to attract the attention of the guards.

"We shall never succeed like this," muttered Miana; "it is evident that there is not space enough to give the cord sufficient swing. We must try some other way."

"What way is there, then?" said André in despair. "Rather than give up my sister I will tell her to throw herself into the river; is the water pretty deep? Bertha can swim well, and will easily reach our boat."

"It would be urging her to certain death," replied Miana.

"The water is not very deep, and your sister would be dashed on the rocks. If I could only scale those cursed walls! I can see little bits of lichen here and there between the stones, but they would not be strong enough to bear my weight."

"What matter," said André; "if that is the only way I will attempt it;" and raising himself on the first stone ridge forming the plinth of the wall, he reached one of the lichens with his arm.

"Stay!" exclaimed Miana, "I have an idea. Though these tufts are too weak to hold us, they will easily bear my monkey's weight. Hanouman shall take the rope up.

He fastened the cable round the little animal's waist, and holding him against the wall, lifted him to the first tuft, then simply said, "Go up!" and the intelligent animal began to climb the wall.

Even for a monkey the task was difficult and perilous, inasmuch as the weight of the rope as it unrolled hindered his movements; thus the ascent was slow and tedious. A dozen times the poor creature stopped, not knowing how to go on; at last, to their great joy, the two lads saw him reach the balcony, and with a bound jump on to the parapet.

Bertha could not stifle a frightened exclamation at sight of the strange messenger; but soon recovering from her alarm she seized the rope, fastened it to one of the balustrades and bravely let herself slip down it.

A moment later she was in André's arms. They exchanged a long, silent kiss, standing motionless close against the rock, unable to conquer their overpowering emotion.

Miana quickly put an end to this dangerous situation of affairs. "We must be quick, and get back to Mali," said he; "we are not saved yet, and you will have time to speak to each other when we are in the boat. Mademoiselle must let herself slip down the rope to the water, and we will follow."

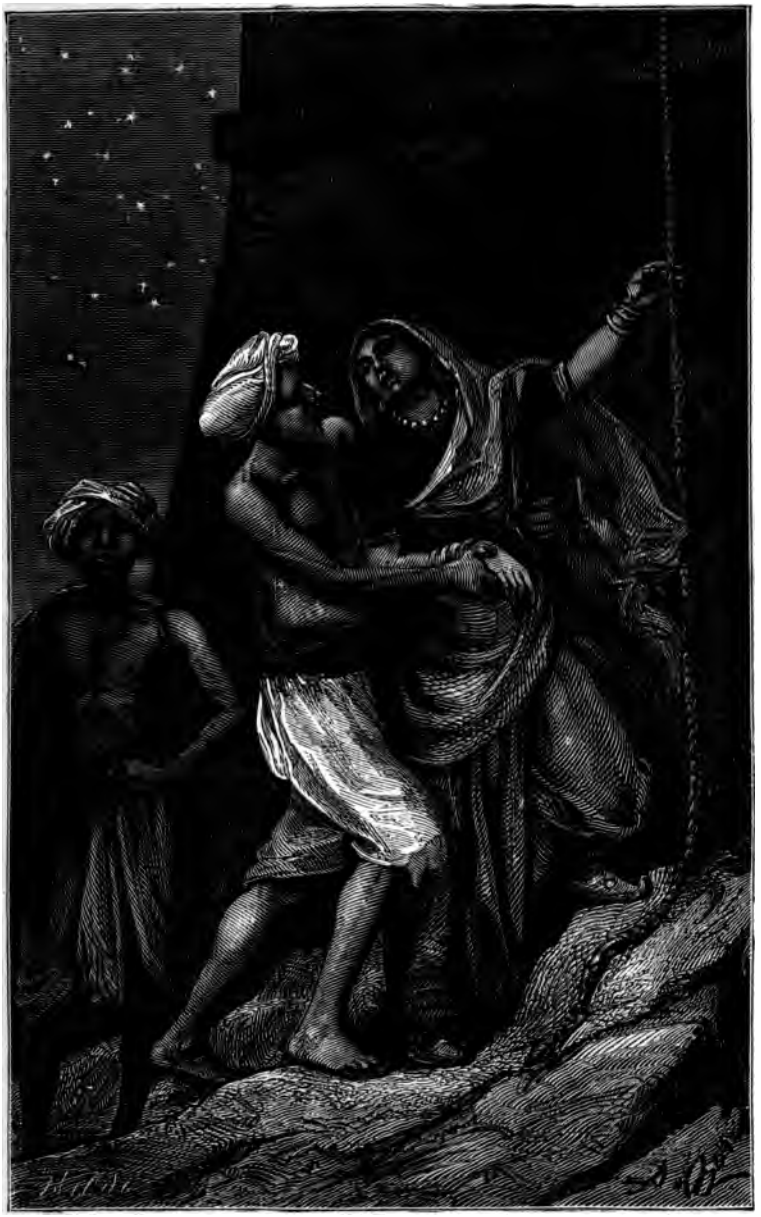
Bertha let herself down without any accident, and a few instants later all the fugitives, Hanouman included, were safe in the boat.

"Pull off, my lads," said Mali, "and row well; we will talk later on. I only regret one thing; that is being obliged to leave the rope hanging from the balcony; our means of escape will be only too evident."

At that moment a bright light appeared at Bertha's window. A figure was seen on the balcony, and a despairing cry rang through the night air—"Doulân Sircar."

Bending with their rapid strokes, the young men rowed with all their might, and the boat, now carried along by the current, shot down the river like an arrow.

All at once a gun was fired from Eklingarh citadel, and at that signal all the gongs in the city rang out the alarm. Confused sounds, then loud clamours, disturbed the stillness of the night, and soon the water-gate was noisily opened, and a band of soldiers carrying torches passed through and



She was in André's arms.

Page 216.

dispersed along the banks. But already the fugitives had doubled the cape of the citadel, and their boat, gliding through the darkness, was carrying them far from their prison—to liberty.

"They were already far from Punderpoor."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLIGHT.

WHEN day broke the fugitives were already far from Punderpoor. The two young men had not left their oars for a moment all night, and aided by the rapid current of the Sutledj, they had come a considerable distance. If not yet quite out of reach of their enemies, they had, at least, a good start of them, for no boat had yet been seen in pursuit. It was very probable that in the first moments of confusion the people of Punderpoor had not noticed the disappearance of the boat, and had sought for the fugitives on the banks; but they must quickly have discovered their

mistake, and it could not be hoped that they had abandoned all idea of pursuing them by water.

Mali, thinking that the young men had better reserve their strength, ordered them to rest whilst he took the helm and let the current carry them along.

Worn out with fatigue and emotion, Bertha had fallen into a deep sleep soon after leaving Punderpoor, and she lay at the bottom of the boat on a bed of shawls and coverlets.

André leaving his oars, sat quietly beside his sister and gazed on the lovely face he had so long despaired of ever seeing again. He thanked God, who had allowed him, a feeble youth, to surmount so many obstacles, and triumph over such powerful enemies, with the sole help of two poor beggars. What gratitude he owed to these devoted companions, to the good Mali, who had so often snatched him from danger, and to Miana, who had so simply and entirely given himself up to his cause! What could he ever do to reward these two men, so purely disinterested and devoted? Was he not now as poor as they, since Nana had ravaged his father's house and property? His thoughts now wandered to that father. What had become of him? Was he dead, or had he escaped his enemies? Henceforth the solution of this terrible mystery must be the end of all his efforts. He would continue his life as a beggar, and with the aid of his friends would penetrate, if needs be, right into the midst of Nana's camp to learn the truth, and save his father were he still alive.

At that moment Bertha opened her eyes, and meeting

her brother's gaze, she sprang up, and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming,—

"Oh, my André! Have I indeed found thee again?" Just this minute I was not sleeping, but feeling myself so gently rocked, I wondered whether I were not still in my hammock at Punderpoor, and if all that has happened these last two days were not simply a long dream. No, it is not so; it is all true, is it not? I am free, I am saved! Oh, how glad I am! and how can I ever thank you for so much happiness?"

"Yes, my dear little sister," said André, "you are free, you are saved; and henceforth, I hope, out of reach of your enemies; but you must not thank me for saving you: it is Mali there who has saved us both."

"My good Mali," said Bertha, throwing her arms round the old man's neck, "so it is you who are our good angel. How glad I am that I owe my life to you!"

"Mademoiselle," replied the charmer, in a voice trembling with emotion, "I did but remember, and I am already richly rewarded for what I have done. Besides, I have but been the instrument in the hand of the invisible and all-powerful Mahadeo to accomplish his decrees. But your brother has had the largest share in your deliverance. If I have aided him with my counsel, it is no less he who by his firm will has guided and sustained us."

"You shall know soon all that we owe Mali," said André; "first of all, let me introduce my friend Miana, a noble fellow, whom you may love as a brother."

Miana having lost his usual spirits, kept himself bash-

fully at the other end of the boat, but on a sign from André he came forward and allowed Bertha to kiss him.

Then it was Hanouman's turn. The good monkey received the young girl's thanks, and executed two or three somersaults by way of showing his satisfaction. As for Sâprani, who, awakened by the talking, had raised her head from under her blanket, she was an old acquaintance, and with all her outburst of happiness, Bertha contented herself with giving her a doubtful smile.

"And our father?" cried the young girl all at once. "How could I forget him for a moment in the midst of my joy? Where is he? How is it he is not with you? But he is alive, is he not? He is in safety? Why do you not answer me? Ah! what I feared is true; my father is dead." And the poor girl burst into tears.

"No, dear sister; we may still hope that our father is alive," said André, trying to calm this outburst of grief, "but I know not what has become of him. Listen, and you shall hear all that has happened since the traitor Nana brought desolation among us."

The young man then related all that had occurred since the burning of the factory. He told how he had been saved by Mali, then cared for, and at last led by him to Punderpoor.

When he had finished, Bertha again embraced her brother's two companions; then she said in a firm, clear voice,—

"All that I have heard shows that we must never doubt Providence. God, who has been so good to us through all our terrible trials, will not allow our dear father to be cut

off from us. Even as you miraculously escaped from your enemies, our father may have succeeded in reaching a place of safety, since we already know that his flight was confirmed by Nana's emissaries themselves. I am certain we shall find him again ; we must at once set out and look for him. I feel full of courage, and will follow you wherever you go. Since Mali has succeeded in making you pass as his son, I will be his daughter; and if needs be, I will charm serpents with you, although I have such a horror of the nasty creatures."

"If you will allow me, mademoiselle," said Miana, at once taking the plan seriously, "I will teach you to make Hanouman dance; that will be more agreeable to you."

"We will see about that later on," interposed Mali; "but before anything else we must get out of our enemies' reach. I do not yet feel quite far enough from them. Take the oars, my lads, and let us fly."

A few moments later the boat was speeding like an arrow down the river, which flowed swiftly between high rocky banks, so encased that they could scarcely catch a glimpse of the tops of the mountains encircling the valley.

"If we go on like this," said the charmer, after a two hours' stretch, "we shall be at Loudiana to-morrow morning. But we must reserve our rowers' strength: it is time to breakfast, and I can see a wooded creek there which will just suit us. We can moor our boat, and cook our food on the bank."

"We will make some tea," said Miana, laughing.

"To be sure," said Bertha. "Oh, how pleasant it is to be travelling like this with friends!"

"Yes," said André; "and, unfortunately, with enemies behind us."

A minute later, the boat, skilfully guided by the old charmer, was moored in the creek. The spot was well chosen. The cliff ended abruptly to form a small circular bay, surrounded by an even shore rising gently to the border of a dense wood. The calm, limpid water of this natural harbour contrasted strangely with the turbulent, muddy waves of the Sutledj.

The fugitives had quickly landed. Bertha joyfully threw herself down on the fresh, green carpet of grass, whilst her companions disembarked the provisions, lighted a fire, and prepared breakfast. As Miana had predicted, tea was added to this sumptuous impromptu feast, of which they all partook with such appetite as they had not had for long enough.

After the meal, André begged Bertha to tell them all her adventures since she had been carried away from the factory.

"My story will not take long to tell," said the young girl, "though each month has seemed as long as a year, and I can sum it up in a few words: my life during this time has been nothing but a long, dreary captivity.

"When I saw you fall, my poor André, struck brutally to the ground by the ruffian who was carrying me away, I uttered a loud scream and fainted. When I recovered my senses several hours later, I found myself lying on a bed

with gilded posts in a sumptuous room. In great alarm I sprang from my couch, and rushed to one of the windows. Day was breaking, the Ganges flowed majestically at the foot of my prison. I was at Bihtour. Still ignorant that it was the odious Nana who had betrayed us, I thought I was saved, and went hastily to the door to try and hear something of you. On the threshold I was stopped by a slave, who said to me respectfully, 'Princess, you must not leave this room.' 'Am I then a prisoner?' I exclaimed. 'Why will they not let me see Prince Doundou, who at least can tell me where my father is?' 'It is the Prince himself who has given orders that on no pretext whatsoever are you to leave this room,' replied the slave. In vain I begged and entreated, the slave was immovable, and would tell me nothing, and even threatened, if I offered any resistance, he would call the guards to make me submissive.

"I passed two days in the greatest anxiety. Numerous servants attended to my wants, and lavished marks of the most profound respect on me, but were mute to my despairing questions.

"The third day, as I was standing on the balcony of my room, I saw a great number of boats, filled with people, coming up the river. They were moored at the palace quay. A man, splendidly dressed, got out of the first boat, and I soon recognized him as Prince Doundou. His people ran to meet him, and prostrated themselves before him, crying, 'Shri Peïchva Nana! Live, sovereign of the world, liberator of India!'

"Greatly surprised at these words, I was watching the brilliant procession as it entered the castle, when I saw that the boats following the Prince's, with the exception of the oarsmen, were filled with European women and children. I at once thought that they were fugitives coming to take advantage of the refuge Nana had offered them long before the revolt had spread to our country. This thought reassured me. The guards made the fugitives disembark on the quay, and, forming them in ranks, led them towards the castle. To my great horror and alarm, I noticed that these unfortunate people were bound together with cords, like a herd of cattle. As they came nearer, I heard their lamentations and heart-rending cries. The soldiers urged them brutally on with the flat end of their halberds.

"Stupified and horror-striken at this spectacle, I was still standing on the balcony, when I heard footsteps in my room, and, turning round, saw before me Prince Doundou.

"'Nana,' I exclaimed, 'what does this all mean?'

"'And what matter to you, my dear child?' said he, bowing gracefully to me. 'I have only just arrived from Cawnpore, and have come at once to pay my respects to you. I am at your service.'

"'Where is my father?' said I to him.

"'Princess of the house of the Peïchvas,' he replied, 'forget for ever those traitors, who, false to their country, would put it under the foreign yoke. I am now your father; your family is mine. Henceforth I am king, my crown is restored to me, and your place is beside my throne.'

"'But my father? my brother?' I again asked in a trembling voice.

"'They are dead,' said he coldly.

"'Dead!' I cried with indignation, 'slain by you, as you are about to slay the noble victims I have seen led here! Infamous murderer, miserable traitor! You dare to present yourself before me, and inventing I know not what tissue of falsehoods, you come and offer me a share in the price of your crime. I will have nothing from you; my place is among those women and children you are about to slay, and whose fate I will share.'

"'By Siva!' said he with a sneer. 'Ah! I was not deceived. You are worthy of being my niece, the daughter of the Peïchvas. Good blood cannot be mistaken. By Kali! for the last three days I have not seen one of my men defend himself as valiantly as you are doing. But time will bring you to your senses.'

"On hearing his mocking words, I was broken-hearted, and, falling on my knees, I entreated him to slay me, since there was nothing before me but a future of shame and sorrow. He raised me respectfully, saying, 'A little more dignity, if you please, princess; this posture is ill-fitting to your rank.' This was too much. I tore myself from his grasp, and ran out on to the balcony; I was just getting over the balustrade, when I felt myself seized by Nana. He drew me back into the room, and having called my women, left me in their hands, after giving them strict orders to watch me closely.

"The next day he came again, and told me that I

was to be taken to Lucknow, and from there to Punderpoor.

"'If you persist in your obstinacy,' said he to me, 'I shall have you fettered, and you will make the journey in that way.'

"Since the previous evening, I had reflected that I had no right to kill myself, my life belonged to my Creator, and He alone must take it from me. Thus I answered Nana:

"'It would be useless to have me fettered. I promise you I will not attempt to take my life.'

"'Swear that you will not,' he said.

"'I swear it on this cross,' I said, putting my hand on the jewel which hung round my neck.

"'Very well; now, farewell, my charming niece. When we meet again, I shall be Emperor of India, and you Queen of the Himalayas,' and with these words he left me.

"A few days later I left the castle, mounted on an elephant, and surrounded by a strong escort. For a month we travelled without stopping across burning plains, through dense forests, and over snow-clad mountains. During the whole of this journey my guards kept me well out of sight; I spoke to no one the whole time.

"At last we reached Punderpoor. My entry there was indeed triumphal: the king, surrounded with his courtiers, came to meet me, and the people shouted enthusiastically. It was only then I learnt that Nana had betrothed me to the hereditary Prince of Punderpoor, a child seven years old. I cannot tell you all I had to suffer in my prison; I

was the object of all kinds of persecution. My courage began to fail, and I was already regretting the promise Nana had extracted from me, when I was one day taken to the temple, to prostrate myself before Kali. You know the rest, you who have saved me."

André kissed his sister's brow, and said simply, "Let us forget all past perils, and brace ourselves to face the future with courage and hope."

Mali, always prudent, now gave the signal for departure; the provisions were embarked, and the fugitives were just about to get into the boat, when they perceived that Miana was not with them. Climbing up the rocks, the young Hindoo had run as far as the entrance to the creek, and seemed to be attentively examining the course of the river. All at once his companions saw him rush back with a look of terror. On coming up to them he cried,—

"Fly, fly for your lives! the enemy is upon us!"

Panic at once seized the little band. Bertha, followed by André and the young Hindoo, ran off towards the forest.

"Stop, my lads!" cried Mali to them; "by running away like that we shall be certain to be lost."

The young people stopped for a moment undecided.

"The boats pursuing us are still far enough off," continued the charmer; "we have a few minutes left, let us take advantage of them to draw the boat out of the water and drag it up into the wood. If we left it, our enemies would very quickly discover our hiding-place, and we should not have gone a hundred yards before they would

overtake us. Besides, even if we did escape them, what should we do in the jungle without fire-arms or food. Do not lose a moment—quick to work!"

In the twinkling of an eye the young men, assisted by the charmer, and even Bertha, had drawn the light craft out of the water. They dragged it to the wood, and concealed it behind a thick clump of shrubs. Then the three guns brought from Punderpoor were loaded, and the fugitives, entrenched behind their boat, prepared to sell their lives dearly in case of surprise.

These preparations were scarcely finished when three boats filled with soldiers, whose lances and guns gleamed in the sunlight, appeared at the entrance of the creek.

The fugitives could hear the chief, who, standing up in the bows of the first boat, shouted to his comrades,—

"Stop a few minutes in this creek, for our oarsmen will be done up."

The boats entered the harbour, and stopped there.

"No one here," continued the chief; "yet I could have sworn that we should catch the robbers here. This creek is the only accessible point to land all along the river from Punderpoor, and I wager the fugitives have as much need of rest as we have. Fear decidedly gives them wings, but they cannot escape us. His Highness the Maharajah has despatched horsemen, who must reach Pahargarh before them and give the alarm. They must go through that town, and will be easily caught. If I were not afraid of displeasing the high priest Mahadji, I would take advantage of this creek to let you rest; but

it is not to be thought of. The king's anger is so great, that if the fugitives escape through our negligence, our heads will not be long on our shoulders. Now off again!"

And the boats, leaving the bay, followed the centre of the stream.

"Did you hear the chief's words?" said André to Mali as soon as the boats had disappeared. "If it had not been for you, we should have been caught in the trap. But what are we to do? The river is of no use to us"

"No indeed," said the charmer, "and nothing remains but to fly through the jungle. A few days' march will bring us to English territory, and when once there, we are safe, but the road will be rough and difficult: will your sister be able to bear the fatigue?"

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Bertha. "Did I not just now tell you that I was ready to follow you anywhere? I am stronger than you think, and the journey does not frighten me. My father early taught me to accustom myself to fatigue, and I have many times followed him on long hunting excursions."

"Very well, let us start at once" said Mali. "Every moment is precious: who knows but that our enemies, not finding us at Pahargarh, will come back to look for us? Let us make haste. You, mademoiselle, whilst we are making a few preparations, try to change your rich dress for a more humble garb,—you will find clothes in the boat, —your costly attire would betray us at the first village we came to."

The young girl took the clothes Mali had brought, and went into the forest. A few minutes later she came back modestly dressed in a graceful dhouti with wide folds, the costume of the women of Northern India.

"Before we start," said the charmer, "we must put this boat somewhere out of sight, or it would easily set our enemies on our track."

"Let us burn it," proposed Miana.

"No," said Mali, "we will put it in the water and leave it to the mercy of the current."

The boat was dragged down to the river, and there the fugitives turned it over with its keel uppermost, and left it.

"In this way our enemies will think we have been drowned," said the old man, "and will give up all idea of pursuing us."

The young people praised Mali's ingenuity; then the heavy burdens of provisions were shared among the three men, and the little band entered the jungle.

"Not a house had escaped the flames."

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN DODA.

FOR a week the fugitives journeyed on through dense forests, avoiding all frequented places, and following the crest of the mountain overlooking the left bank of the Sutledj. The numerous wild beasts which infest these regions, where scarcely ever a human being is seen, obliged them, as in the Térai, to look for some large tree every night, where they might take refuge. Then, in order to reserve Bertha's strength, they made a short march in the early morning and rested during the heat of the day, and then again walked on till nightfall.

The young girl bore these hardships bravely, and by her invariable goodhumour sustained her companions' hope and courage.

Although it was slow travelling, on the eighth day the little band reached the last slope of the mountain, and stretching before them they saw the immense, uniform plain of the Punjaub, which, watered by the five magnificent rivers whence it derives its name, extends from the Himalayas to the mountains of Afghanistan.[1]

"We are now out of reach of the people from Punderpoor," said Mali; "but the question is, shall we find here friends or enemies?"

"And yet," said André, "the Punjaub is an English province, and we must surely find protection here."

"Yes," replied the charmer, "if the English have been conquerors. If not we shall fall into the midst of the rebels, and in that case we can expect no mercy. Any way, our retreat is cut off, so we must go on, and perhaps by prudence we may yet succeed in passing through here. If we can but reach Rajpootana, we are saved, for the noble sons of kings would never lower themselves to become assassins. In any case we shall soon know our fate. I can see a large village down yonder. We will go there, and according to what the inhabitants tell us, we can judge what it is best to do."

[1] The word *Punjaub*, or rather *Pantchâb*, signifies the land of the five rivers: this country is in fact seamed from north to south by the Sutledj, the Ravee, the Chenaub, the Jeelum, and the Indus, this last receiving an enormous body of water from its four great affluents.

In fact, a few miles from the foot of the mountain a large clump of mangoes forming a green oasis in the midst of the bare plain revealed the presence of a village.

The fugitives walked on in this direction, expecting every moment to meet some peasant going to his work in the fields, for the sun had risen two hours ago, and the time was favourable. However, they reached the outskirts of the village without meeting any one.

A strange silence reigned over the country; they heard none of the usual sounds, neither the light-hearted song of the labourer or shepherd, nor the grinding of millstones, which are always at work, nor even the sound of fowl or cattle. Thus Mali and his companions were filled with vague apprehension on reaching the village.

Scarcely had they entered it, when a frightful spectacle met their eyes. The houses were nothing but blackened ruins heaped up with broken beams and charred furniture. In the deserted streets stood large pools of blood, evident proof that all this desolation was but recent work. Finally, at the end of the village lay a heap of corpses.

Bertha drew back with horror at the sight, but her companions ran towards the charnel-house. André having reached it first, turned round, calling out joyfully,—

"They are rebels! The English must be masters of the country;—we are saved!"

Mali examined the corpses in his turn.

"In any case," said he, "there has been fighting here, for I see among the poor wretches, Sepoys with the English crown on their buttons; they were not rebels. You know

Mali examined the corpses.

that one of Nana's first orders was to command the revolting soldiery to keep their uniform, but to do away with everything about it indicating that it belonged to the English Government. It is therefore very difficult to say, from what we can see, which party was victorious. Let us hope that it was our friends."

After having rested for a few minutes the fugitives left this fatal spot. They travelled on across the plain for part of the day, and, towards evening, came to another large village. There again war had left traces of all its horrors. The streets were strewn with corpses, and not a house had escaped the flames. All the inhabitants had fled.

"How frightful it is!" exclaimed Bertha, trembling with horror. "What has come over this unhappy country? Is it possible that men can be such brutes?"

"Ah, mademoiselle!" said the old man, "how can I answer you? Who are the guilty ones? Certainly no one more than I can disapprove of the horrible crimes of my countrymen, and my conduct shows how little I share their sentiments. But are not these unfortunate creatures to be excused? Formerly, these rich plains, these magnificent mountains,—in a word, the whole of incomparable India was their property. Their ancestors built cities here, adorned with monuments, and governed by wise laws and a refined civilization, whilst your cold Europe was, so they say, nothing but a pestilential marsh. Then, after many centuries, Europeans, attracted by the renown of our riches, came to our country; first of all as humble men full of good words. Instead of driving them away as our neigh-

bours the Chinese did, we Hindoos received the white men courteously, we opened our towns to them, and gave them part of our treasures. Little by little they insinuated themselves amongst us, taking advantage of our quarrels and dissensions. At last becoming the stronger, under pretext that our skin was dark, and that we worshipped idols, they robbed us of our cities and lands, and shared our wealth among them, as though it belonged to them by right. Now the oppressed Hindoos are rising up against their masters. Who can say that they have not right on their side? What they are to be condemned for, is that instead of rising like men and fighting as soldiers, they have crouched like tigers to spring upon defenceless people, women and children. Thus all honest folks keep aloof from them, and whatever the rebels may do, they will be crushed. But once again, are they the only guilty ones?"

"No," said André, "it must be confessed that we Europeans are the cause of all these frightful calamities. One thing, however, consoles me, which is, that the French, my ancestors, when they were masters of India for a time, knew how to rule with a light hand and make themselves beloved by their subjects."

"Quite true," continued Mali, "the French were not masters, but brothers, and their memory has always been held dear. All India still deplores their departure."

The little band were obliged to content themselves with seeking a shelter for the night among the ruins. But the following day again they found nothing but abandoned villages. The country was deserted, and the provisions

were beginning to fail! Mali proposed they should leave this desolated land, and instead of continuing their way towards Lahore, the fugitives turned southward towards Patalah.

After a two days' march they at last came in sight of a village which the war seemed to have spared. Tall columns of bluish smoke wound up from the houses, and slowly dispersed through the quiet atmosphere. For one moment the fugitives thought the village was on fire, but on drawing near they saw that the smoke was produced by potters' kilns, around which the workmen were peacefully moving to and fro. So they went on, and having spoken to one of these men, they learnt that the name of the village was Tchati, that it was situated ten miles from Patalah, and that its inhabitants were composed entirely of potters of a low caste.

Reassured by this information, the travellers entered the village, and inquired for the Brahmin, the religious chief of the community. The Brahmin, a venerable old man, received the fugitives kindly, and offered them hospitality in his house.

Mali introduced his companions to the Brahmin, speaking of André and Bertha as his children; then he said to his host,—

"We come from Punderpoor, where the venerable Mahadji invited us to be present at the ceremonies celebrated in that town in honour of the betrothal of the hereditary prince with the Doulân Sircar, the niece of the mighty Doundou Pant, lord of Bihtour."

"Say rather of his Highness Nana, king of the Maharattas," interrupted the priest. "Do you not know that he whom you call Prince Doundou is now master of India. After having driven the English from every place in the valley of the Ganges, he has sent his armies to pursue them in the north. Already he has possession of Delhi, Meerut, and Patalah, and his lieutenant Captain Doda is at this moment fighting not far from here, to cut off the road to Lahore, which a handful of English still defend, aided by a few Sikhs."

"I was indeed ignorant of this," replied Mali, "and am quite bewildered by this astonishing news; it has not yet crossed the Himalayas, for when we left, the king himself, whom I had the honour of seeing, knew nothing of it. Who would ever have thought the power of our masters would crumble away like this? Do the people of this country all side with Nana then?"

"I cannot say that we have all been so glad to receive Nana's partisans," replied the Brahmin. "What do we gain by this war? The English left us to mind our own affairs peacefully. My people were making a good profit out of their potteries and the produce of their fields. Now, under pretext of delivering us, Nana's men are ruining the country; they burn villages, ransack the kilns, and rob the orchards. It was in this way that they destroyed the village near Kolah, a week ago. We tremble for our own safety, and are anxiously awaiting the end of this war. Not," added he prudently, "that my wishes are not for our legitimate sovereign, the high and mighty Nana Sahib,

and every day I beseech Karticeya, the god of war, to grant him victory."

From this conversation it was evident that the old Brahmin was secretly in favour of the English, but stood in awe of the rebels. Thus it would have been imprudent to confide in him, so Mali and his companions resolved to scrupulously adhere to their assumed characters. However, they took advantage of their host's goodnature to spend the day at Tchati, and rest themselves.

At night, the fugitives retired to one of the rooms in the old priest's house, and were just falling asleep when a cannon-shot at no great distance made the slightly-built house totter. This shot was followed by several others, and soon the ground shook with formidable discharges of artillery.

"Up, my children," exclaimed Mali, "and let us fly: there is fighting close at hand!"

In a moment the little band had sprung up and rushed out of the room.

"They are fighting!" exclaimed the old Brahmin, on seeing them enter the room where he stood surrounded by a group of peasants, who, filled with terror, were talking wildly and behaving like mad people.

"We must fly from the village!" said Mali to them; "if we wait any longer we shall be all burnt to death, for the bullets will soon set fire to these thatched roofs."

"Flight is impossible," said one of the peasants; "the battle is raging all round us, and to go from here would be running into certain death. I tried just now to escape

across the country, but the bullets whistled round my head like a flight of wild paroquets, and I was forced to get back to the village crawling along the ground."

"What is to be done then?" said André, throwing an arm around his frightened sister.

"Remain here," simply replied Mali; "I will myself go and see what is best to be done."

He went out, and returned in ten minutes' time, when he was at once surrounded by the terrified people.

"I have been round the village," said he, "and it is indeed impossible to fly just now; the battle is raging all around us; but we must hold ourselves in readiness; the fighting seems to be going towards the north; perhaps in an hour's time we shall be able to escape in the opposite direction. As for you, my children," said he to his companions, "stay in your room, and be ready at the first signal."

During part of the night the battle raged round Tchati; a few bullets struck the houses, and set fire to some, but fortunately the flames did not spread. At last, towards morning, the cannonading ceased, the gun-shots grew fainter in the distance, and the peasants acting as scouts came to say that the English troops were beating a retreat closely pursued by the soldiers of the Peïchva.

At this news all the bystanders filled the room with enthusiastic cries of "Long live Nana Sahib! long live the Peïchva!"

"Come quickly, let us go!" cried Mali to his companions. And bidding their host a hasty farewell, the fugitives

reached the door; but it was too late. At the same moment the rebels entered the village. To face them would have been too perilous. At a sign from Mali the young people followed him back again into the Brahmin's house, and mingled among the peasants.

A moment later a horseman, richly dressed, riding at the head of a band of tattered soldiers, stopped in front of the house. He sprang nimbly from his saddle, and entered the principal room, followed by his men.

"Halloa!" cried he roughly as he came in, "is there no one here to welcome the liberators of the country? Where is the master of the house?"

"Here I am," said the priest, hurrying forward, and bowing humbly to the officer. "I was not informed of your arrival, and—"

"Enough! I am Captain Doda, lieutenant-general of the army of the north of his ever-victorious Highness the Peïchva. I have just given those English gentlemen a drubbing which they will remember for long enough. But this night's fighting has sharpened my appetite, and I have chosen your house to rest in. Send me something to eat and drink, and let my people be looked after. Now quick! if not, the rope and fire shall bring you to your senses."

Whilst the Brahmin and his servants, trembling with fear, hurried to and fro to wait upon the Captain, Mali and his companions tried to get out of the house. They went all over the place without finding an outlet. Thus they were compelled to go back to the room adjoining the one occupied by the soldiers.

"I entreat you," said the charmer to his companions, "whatever happens, be calm, and above all try to keep out of sight of the rebels. Remain in this room without moving; perhaps we shall be able to escape."

The danger was serious, and the chances of escape seemed very small to the old charmer, but he concealed his fears from the poor children. At the first glance he had recognized the captain as one of the most savage of Nana's ruffians, the same who had directed the pillage of M. Bourquien's factory, and who later on had been commanded to escort Bertha to Punderpoor. Most fortunately the young girl had not perceived her former goaler, or she would have understood the whole extent of the peril which awaited her and her friends.

Meanwhile the captain was eating and drinking, and as he swallowed arrack and rice, he related his exploits for the benefit of the bystanders. He interspersed his accounts of pillage and murder with noisy bursts of laughter, which shook the whole room; that which he did not tell was that for a fortnight he had been beating a retreat, before the combined forces of the English and Sikhs, and that on this very night he was on the point of being surrounded, when suddenly, by an inexplicable manœuvre, the English had given way, and beaten a rapid retreat. The captain took care not to follow them, which did not hinder him from exclaiming,—

"By Kali! I don't believe we spared one of the cowards. You ought to have seen them fall one on the top of another, or stop to beg for mercy. May Siva forgive me

but my arm was so weary I could strike no longer, and I contented myself with trampling the wretches down under my horse's feet. I shall to-day send a messenger with news of the victory to our faithful ally, the King of Punderpoor."

"Just so," said the Brahmin eagerly. "I have a band of *Nâts* here in my house, who have come direct from that town."

"Ah!" exclaimed the captain, "I am glad to hear that; these good people will be able to give me news of my friends, and can go back and announce my victory. Have them brought here!"

Mali, who had heard all from the adjoining room, had only time to whisper to his companions, "Do not move!" and then he entered the large room.

"Here," said the Brahmin, presenting the charmer to the captain, "is one of the *Nâts* from Punderpoor."

The officer uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"How now! you here, Mali?"

"Even so, my lord captain."

"And what on earth have you been doing at Punderpoor?"

"That which I do everywhere else," said Mali, "charming serpents, and amusing the people by my companion's acrobatic performances."

"And who is this companion?" continued the captain.

"You shall see him.—Miana!" the charmer called out; and the young Hindoo entered the room with his monkey on his shoulder.

"Come here," said Mali to him; "my lord the captain wishes to question you."

"By no means," said the officer abruptly; "I have seen him, and that is enough. My business is with you, Mali. You must know that very precise reports have been sent me about you from Cawnpore, by his Highness Nana. You are accused of treason, and I am ordered to seize your person, and have you shot."

"May I know," calmly replied the charmer, "how I can have merited such merciless punishment?"

"You are accused of betraying your country, and of siding with our enemies. It is you, they say, who helped M. Bourquien, our master's personal enemy, to escape, and it is you also who have sheltered his son, young André, from our vengeance. Do you think these crimes do not deserve punishment? But before sending you to join your friends the Sahibs in dark Patal, I intend to know what you have to say in your defence."

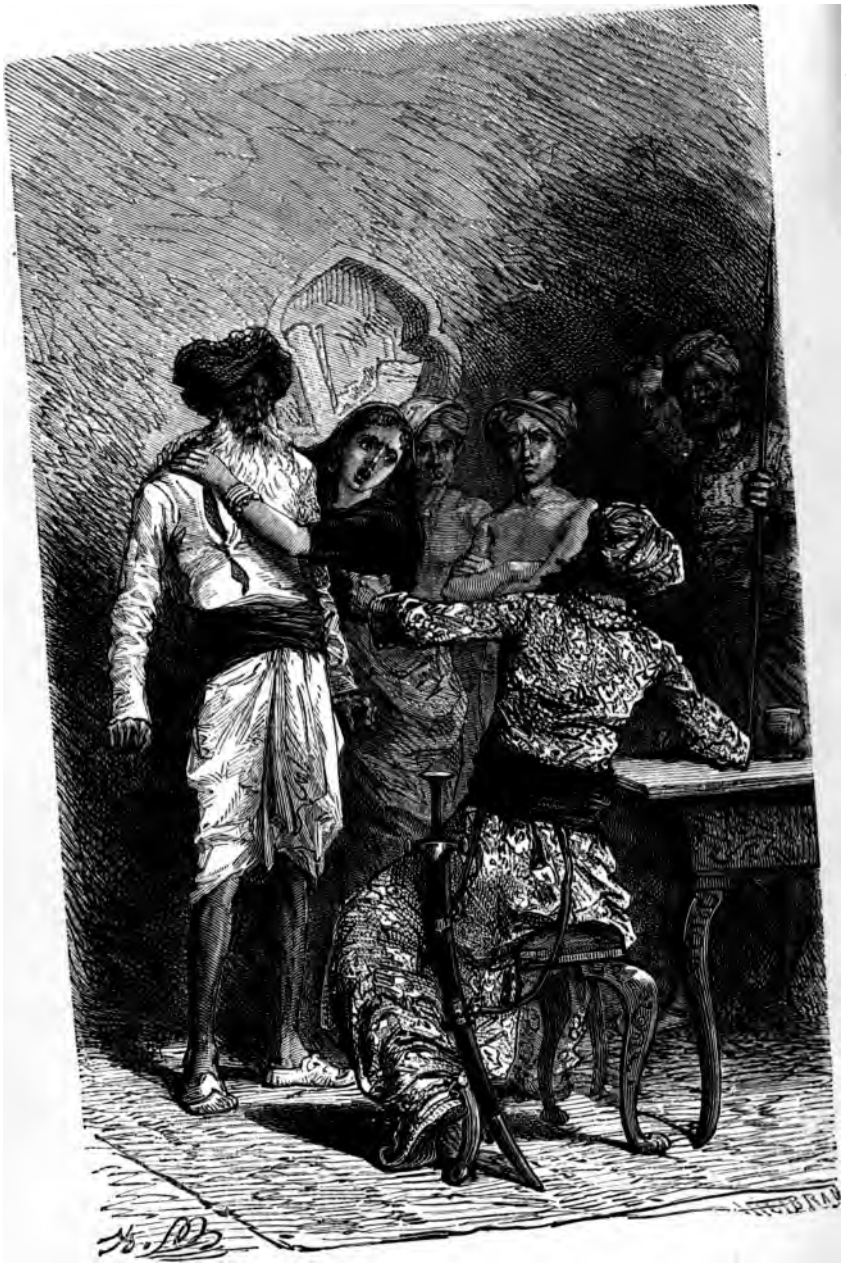
"Nothing," replied Mali; "what is the use of defending myself, since I am condemned beforehand?"

"At least tell me what you have been doing at Punderpoor."

"I have already told you."

"Ah! so this is the way you answer me!" furiously exclaimed the captain. "Very well, you shall die. Take away this dog and his companion, and shoot them. No, let them hang by their feet; it is a slower death, and more worthy of such traitors as these."

André and Bertha heard these words from the adjoining room. Forgetting all prudence, and listening only



Bertha threw her arms round the charmer's neck. Page 275.

to the promptings of their affection for these two honest men, who were about to die for them, they entered the room. Bertha threw her arms round the old charmer's neck, whilst André placed himself in front of Miana, as though to protect him.

"Kill us with them," cried they together, "or spare them, for we are the only guilty ones."

It is impossible to depict the captain's bewilderment on seeing André and Bertha before him, especially the latter, whom he believed to be still at Punderpoor.

The officer rose, shaking with passion, and in a terrible voice he shouted,—

"Guards, seize those men! Let no one touch the young girl."

In the twinkling of an eye Mali and his two friends were seized and disarmed by the soldiers.

Bertha, left free, stood in the centre of a group of peasants and soldiers. The captain, mad with rage, drew his sword, and paced the room furiously brandishing the weapon in the air. One could see his thick brains were puzzling themselves to unravel the mysterious problem placed before him. What should he do with these men? What punishment horrible enough could he devise? How could they have succeeded in carrying off the princess, whom he had so safely imprisoned, and whom he was answerable for with his head to the terrible Nana? Where should he put her in safety now? All these thoughts clashed together, and perplexed him. His blood was up, and his wrath was about to break forth.

A deathlike silence reigned in the room,—soldiers, peasants, and Brahmin gazed with utter bewilderment on this inexplicable scene.

All at once a sweet, firm voice was heard; it was Bertha who spoke.

"Why do you pace about thus, Doda, like a tiger in a cage? Have you forgotten your trade, and do you tremble to add a few more innocent people to the long list of your victims? I know you are merciless, and if you hesitate, it is because you are trying to find some new torture to inflict on your prisoners. Come, be generous!—strike quickly, and let me be your first victim."

"You need not scoff at me, princess," shouted the bandit, "or I will have each of these wretches slowly cut to pieces before you. You know very well that their fate and yours are quite different. I answer with my head for your life, and no one will dare lay a finger on you."

"You may sneer, Doda," continued the young girl courageously; "whether you wish or no, if my friends die, I die with them. Look, here is liberty!" and she showed him a sharp stiletto which she had held concealed in her hand.

The officer made a brutal gesture to seize the weapon, but the young girl stopped him, saying,—

"If you move, I will plunge this dagger into my breast. Listen to what I am about to propose: restore my brother and his companions to liberty, and I swear to you that as soon as they are in safety and out of reach, I will throw this dagger away and quietly let myself be taken wherever you wish."

Doda hesitated. He once again tried by cunning to snatch the stiletto away, but Bertha was on her guard. Then, seeing his attempt foiled, the bandit exclaimed, "Well, since you will have it so, you shall all die!"

"The captain continued the struggle alone."

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW FRIEND.

As he uttered this threat, Captain Doda sprang towards Bertha with uplifted sword, but ere he reached her André had thrust aside his guards, and snatching a cimeter from one of them, he threw himself resolutely in front of his sister. The cowardly bandit drew back, and called his soldiers to his aid.

There was a moment of confusion. The peasants, till now silent spectators of the scene, rushed towards the door, filled with terror. Mali and Miana having freed themselves, seized one a short pike and the other a sword, and ran to

André's help, who, still warding off his assailants' blows, had dragged Bertha into an angle of the room.

The little band bravely held their ground against the pack of ruffians, whom their chief urged on by loud imprecations. But the struggle could not last long, and its result was very evident.

The circle of assailants grew smaller and smaller, and the fugitives driven into a corner found their movements impeded. Mali's pike had been broken by a blow from a hatchet, and he was fencing with the stump. Miana and André wounded, but fortunately very slightly, were covered with blood. One moment more and the horrible crime would have been accomplished.

At that moment loud trumpet blasts were heard outside; shots were fired amidst a clamour of shrieks and hurrahs. One of the rebels put his head in at the door shouting, "The English!" This was the signal for an indescribable pell mell. Without losing a moment, Doda's comrades rushed out of the house and fled in a tumult, like a pack of jackals.

Transported with rage the captain continued the struggle alone. Abandoned by his men, hearing the victorious cries of his enemies outside, the bandit saw that he was lost, and that he would have no chance of wreaking his vengeance. In his fury, he knocked André down with the back of his sword, and drawing out one of the pistols from his girdle, he put the muzzle close to Bertha and was about to fire, but just as he pulled the trigger Mali struck the weapon on one side with a formidable blow, and the

ball, whizzing over the young girl, lodged in the wall above her head. At the same moment André and Miana plunged their swords into the traitor, for a moment off his guard. Letting his sword fall, and clutching at the empty air with his bony hands, Doda rolled backward heavily on to the ground.

Just then the Sikhs belonging to the English regiment burst into the room, shouting "Maro! Maro!" (To death! to death!) At sight of the captain stretched at the feet of the fugitives, they stood for a moment perplexed, then rushing forward brandished their swords over those whom they took for rebels.

André threw down his weapon and ran towards them with open arms.

"We are English!" he cried; "see, I have killed this man, the chief of the rebels."

The soldiers stood still in utter bewilderment. Then an old native sub-officer, with a long grey beard, came cautiously forward and attentively examined the corpse lying in the middle of the room. "It is true," said he; "this is indeed the man we are looking for. I recognize him; he is the rebel Doda," and he ran his sword through he yet throbbing flesh.

"But who are you," said he to André.

"Take us before your chief," replied the young man; "we will explain all to him."

"Very good," said the Sepoy; and addressing his companions, "Disarm these people. We will take them to Lieutenant Algernon. Knock down the first who attempts

Doda's sword fell from his hand.

Page 280.

to escape. You there," said he to André, "follow me. You seem to me to be queer English people, but if you have deceived me, you shall pay for it, for I warn you the lieutenant will stand no nonsense."

Without proffering a word, our four friends followed the grim sub-officer, and escorted by Sepoys they went through the village. The fighting had not lasted long, for gun-shots were only heard at long intervals. The dead and dying filled the principal street. It was evident that the rebels, surprised by the suddenness of the attack, had been shot down without a chance of defending themselves.

Bertha turned aside her head as she passed through this fearful scene of slaughter, where corpses lay thickly strewn around her, but her step was firm, and her face pale and resolute; the strain and excitement of the day had been too great for her yet to find relief in tears.

Lieutenant Algernon, commandant of the detachment which had just so easily surprised Doda's troops, was holding his court-martial outside the village, at the foot of a gigantic banian-tree. The rebels were brought one by one before the officer, who quickly ascertained their identity. Then, at a sign from the lieutenant, the soldiers passed a cord round the condemned man's neck, and hung him on one of the branches of the tree, where several of his friends were already swinging.

On seeing the little band of charmers led between the Sepoys, the young officer got up impatiently.

"Who are you bringing me there, Balou?" cried he to the sub-officer. "You know I gave you strict orders

to leave the peasants, women, and children in peace. We have rebels enough to punish. Let these people go."

"But, lieutenant," stammered the soldier to whom the question was addressed, "we found these men armed, and when we arrested them they themselves asked to be brought before your lordship."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked the young officer, speaking to the fugitives.

"We are British subjects," replied André, in the purest English; "we were on the point of being massacred by the rebels when your men came up."

"What do you say?" asked the lieutenant with emotion. "Are you English, and have I really had the good fortune to snatch victims from the hands of these wretched murderers?"

"I am the son of M. Bourquien, the planter of Gandapoor," replied André.

"Was it not there that Nana Sahib committed his first outrages?" interrupted the officer.

"It was indeed, sir," said André. "My father was stabbed before my eyes by that wretch, and I should have shared his fate had it not been for that man you see there, Mali the charmer. He and his companion Miana, after having saved me, helped me to save my sister, whom Nana had confined in the castle of Punderpoor. We escaped all pursuit until the fighting this morning brought us into contact with Captain Doda, our most implacable enemy. We should all have been killed had not the arrival of your troops saved us."

"My dear sir," said the lieutenant warmly, "I cannot tell you how happy I am to have been the means of saving you. You may henceforth rely on my devotion. But will you be so kind as to introduce me to your sister?" And the handsome young man advancing ceremoniously towards Bertha made her a low bow, whilst André went through the usual formula.

"Miss Bertha Bourquien, allow me to introduce Mr.—"

"Louis Algernon, of Windmore Castle, lieutenant of the Queen's 3rd Fusiliers," added the officer, "and your devoted servant."

All at once, the three young Europeans, forgetting their strange equipments and peculiar surroundings, had become people of the world, and the introduction was made with all the form of English etiquette, as sedately as in a West End drawing-room.

"My men will take you to my tent, which I have had pitched near here," said the lieutenant to André and his sister; "you will be quite at home there, and can rest awhile after the terrible strain you have gone through. As for me, I shall get through my melancholy task as quickly as possible, and then rejoin you."

André and his companions had already gone some distance when they saw the old Brahmin who had given them hospitality being led between two soldiers. Bertha, moved with a feeling of pity, persuaded her brother to go with her, to hear what was said against the old man, and to save him if possible.

"Here," said one of the soldiers, "is a man we seized in

the midst of a band of rebels who fought to the very last."

"What have you to say in your defence?" asked the officer of the Brahmin.

"Have mercy, my lord," cried the old man, prostrating himself to the ground before the lieutenant, "I am innocent, and a friend of the English."

"In any case you have a strange way of showing your friendship," said the lieutenant.

"My lord," continued the Brahmin, "I am the priest and chief of this village. The rebels dragged me with them; they thrust a gun in my hand, but I have not fought."

"That is what you all say when you are taken prisoner," said the officer; "it is an idle excuse. Take him and have him hanged."

"Stop, for pity's sake," cried Bertha, just as the fatal knot was being drawn round the Brahmin's neck. "Monsieur Algernon, this man has told you the truth. Yesterday, when he took us into his house, he did not conceal from us the terror he had of the rebels, and the secret friendship he entertained for the English. My companions can bear witness to the truth of my words."

"Your word is sufficient, mademoiselle," gallantly interrupted the officer. "Release that man," said he to the soldiers. And speaking to the old priest, "Know," said he, "that the English only punish the guilty, and reward those who remain faithful to them. Nevertheless, *it is* dangerous to get mixed with wolves when one is a

sheep, and had it not been for mademoiselle's intervention, you would now be with Vichnu or Siva, whichever you like best."

"Long live the Sahibs! England for ever!" exclaimed the old man recovering his spirits. And these words were immediately repeated by the peasants standing in a circle round the tribunal.

André and his companions withdrew towards the officer's tent, where they were able to attend to the slight wounds they had received, and take a little rest.

Lieutenant Algernon soon rejoined them. He was a charming young man, with fair hair and a pleasing countenance; his still beardless face showed him to be scarcely twenty years old. One would have taken him at first sight for a collegian, rather than a superior officer knowing how to make his men obey and his enemies fear him.

When André and Bertha had fully related their adventures, he said to them,—

"I am very little older than you. Only eight months ago I left the Military Academy at Woolwich with the grade of sub-lieutenant, and received orders to join my corps garrisoned at Calcutta. Scarcely had I arrived when I heard of the revolt which had just broken out in the north, and I was sent with General Lawrence towards Allahabad, then from there with Nicholson's corps against Delhi."

"Is that town once again in the hands of the English?" asked André.

"No, but it cannot hold out much longer. Our troops

are laying close siege to it. One of Nana Sahib's strangest ideas has been, after having himself proclaimed king of the Mahrattas, to wish to revive the Mogul Empire. His partisans have dragged a poor old imbecile man, the last of the Great Moguls, out of the palace where we left him to rust, and have placed him on the throne of the Padishahs. The old idiot knows nothing about it, but it is a fetich in the eyes of India which we are going to demolish for ever with cannon shot. Nana Sahib, who is still fighting in the valley of the Ganges, has sent several bands of soldiers to try and succour Delhi, but we have dispersed them one after another. The last, commanded by Nana's favourite, Captain Doda, is the only one that escaped, and General Nicholson sent me in pursuit of him. Officers being scarce, I received a lieutenant's epaulettes and the command of the expeditionary force. For a month I have been scouring the country after this Doda. Several times I have come up with him, but he has always made off after a short engagement. Last night I attacked him unexpectedly, then seeing that he was about to escape me again, I affected a hurried retreat. My tactics misled him, and my scouts informed me that he had taken up his quarters after the battle in this village. This morning, at daybreak, I returned with the utmost speed, but had it not been for you the brigand would again have got off. I congratulate you, sir, on your late achievement; you have freed us of a very tiresome enemy."

"I am heartily glad of it," said André, "and I only wish his scoundrel of a master had been with him."

"Oh, don't be alarmed!" continued the lieutenant, "he will have his turn, and we will hang him off-hand. Thanks to you, my mission is at an end, the country is at peace again, the rebel troops are dispersed, and I shall be able to make my way back to Delhi. You shall come with me, and from there you will be able to reach some place of safety."

"We accept your offer most willingly," said André.

"One thing alone distresses me," added the officer; "it is not being able to give Mdlle. Bourquien clothes more befitting her rank. I could, if necessary, share my clothes with you, sir; but not foreseeing that I should have to save such a brave heroine, I never thought of providing myself with the indispensable wardrobe."

"Do not let that trouble you," said Bertha, laughing. "I shall wait till I can find a dressmaker at Delhi. This costume has helped me to regain my liberty, I can very well wear it for some time yet."

Lieutenant Algernon insisted on his guests taking their well-earned rest, and did not break up the camp till the following day. He rode at the head of his troops, accompanied by Bertha and André, to whom he had given splendid horses, taken from the rebel chiefs. Miana also, to his great delight, was able to caracole beside his young master on a fine black steed; Hanouman sat behind him. As to old Mali, he preferred to ride in one of the waggons, without forgetting the good Sâprani, who, in the midst of all these events, had remained in her usual hiding-place, and whose performances during the march

contributed in no small degree to heighten the admiration with which the Sepoys regarded the charmer.

Thanks to Lieutenant Algernon, the journey was very pleasant. The young man endeavoured to set his new friends at ease by his cheerful conversation; he spoke of the rebellion as at an end; the country at peace again, they might now set out in search of their father, who must be in concealment somewhere, and whom they would be sure to find. Finally, his inexhaustible good humour won his young companions so completely, that all past troubles were for the time forgotten.

Ten days later the detachment came in sight of Delhi. For some hours the continuous booming of artillery had warned the travellers that they were drawing near the besieged city. On reaching the crest of a hill they beheld the magnificent panorama of the imperial city, with its innumerable minarets, its domes, and its turrets, rising above the formidable line of bulwarks. The firing from the walls went on without cessation, and the English artillery replied with like spirit. All at once the spectators saw long lines of red coats sally from the English camp, and make rapidly towards the town through the midst of the volleys of cannon and musketry.

"They are going to attempt an assault," exclaimed Lieutenant Algernon, full of enthusiasm, and turning to his men: "Forward, my lads, we shall yet be in time. Long live old England!"

This cry was repeated by the Sepoys, who dashed forward after their captain.

However, it took the little band half an hour to cross the scorching plain which separated them from the English camp.

Without stopping at the general quarters to take orders, the lieutenant went in all haste towards the town, leaving his waggons behind.

"Let me follow you, Algernon," said André to him. "Give me a weapon, and you will see whether I am worthy to fight for my adopted country."

"Very well, take a sword, and follow me," said the lieutenant. "As for you, mademoiselle, be so good as to remain under the care of your faithful guards, Mali and Miana, with the rear-guard."

The young officer drew his sword, and galloped forward, followed by André and his cavalry.

In this way they passed a hillock, from the top of which General Nicholson was following the progress of the battle.

On seeing the little detachment pass by, the general and his staff-major saluted. A moment later the new-comers were in the thick of a shower of bullets.

The full tide of the battle lay in the direction of the Cashmere Gate, which had been blown up by cannon-shot the evening before.

The rebels thronging the breach were furiously defending this opening, and, notwithstanding their obstinate attack, the English regiments could make no way through this living wall. But it often takes very little to change the issue of a battle.

On hearing the hurrahs of Algernon's men, and seeing the red uniform of the Sikh soldiers, the rebels believed that the English had just received considerable reinforcements; they gave way for a moment, and that moment allowed the English troops to force the gate and enter the city.

Victory was now assured. Algernon and André had rushed into the *mêlée*, and were sabring the fugitive rebels with all their might.

The city was taken; ere long the green standard with the golden fish which waved from the Imperial Palace was replaced by the British flag.

After an hour's severe fighting Lieutenant Algernon rallied his men, and took his way back to the camp. Having fought without orders, he could not longer delay rejoining his rearguard, and presenting himself to the general.

André, with torn clothes, and black with powder, looked rather like a bandit or a rebel than a companion of the officer at whose side he was riding.

Thus, directly General Nicholson, who had dismounted near the Cashmere Gate, saw the lieutenant and his strange companion, he cried to the young officer,—

"I must congratulate you, Algernon. You came up just in the nick of time, and your initiative has done us good service. As soon as you have a little more hair on your chin we will dub you captain. But who on earth are you bringing me there?" added he, indicating André, who had dismounted, and stood modestly behind his com-

panion. "I thought I said no rebels carrying arms were to be spared, and I can see that youth's sword covered with blood."

"Pardon me, general," said the lieutenant quickly, "my friend André Bourquien is no rebel, he is a loyal and courageous young man, and has fought bravely for us."

The lieutenant's words had been pronounced in a clear ringing tone, and with such an accent of sincerity, that the general held out his hand to André.

But already a superior officer, who had caught the lieutenant's words, had rushed up to the young Frenchman and thrown his arms round him, then turning towards the general, he exclaimed, "It is my son, my brave André!"

It was all so sudden; the poor youth had not even seen his father, and all at once he felt his arms around him.

Almost choked with overwhelming emotion, he could only murmur, "My father!" and then lost consciousness.

M. Bourquien gently lifted him in his arms and carried him to the general's tent, and there, with the appliance of some restoratives, the young man soon recovered his senses.

M. Bourquien's first words, when his son opened his eyes, were to ask in a trembling voice, "Where is Bertha?"

"Here she is," replied the lieutenant, entering the tent, followed by the young girl and the charmers.

How can one describe the joy of father and children on meeting again after a separation which they each thought was for ever?

After having listened to his children's rapid story, during which he warmly pressed the hands of the good Mali and his friend Miana, M. Bourquien told how, profiting by the disorder which had followed the taking of the factory, he had managed to drag himself to the jungle; there, rejoined by one of his servants, he was able to reach Agra, where the Government was organizing a militia of volunteers of which they gave him the command. Since then he had fought like a madman to avenge his children, whom he believed dead.

EPILOGUE.

ELEVEN years after the events which I have just related, in the month of July, 1868, finding myself at Cawnpore, I accompanied an English officer of the garrison to see the ruins of the Palace of Bhitour, which had been plundered by Outram's troops. As we were returning from this excursion, my friend proposed that we should visit a neighbouring factory.

"The factory of Gandapoor is the finest in the country," said he, "and will interest you all the more as it belongs to one of your countrymen—M. Bourquien. We are sure to be made welcome; there is not a more hospitable house, and besides, the son-in-law of the proprietor, Captain Algernon, is a great friend of mine."

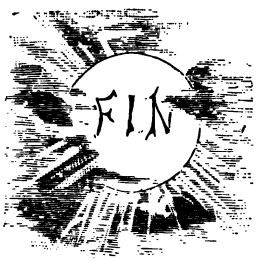
We were indeed cordially received at Gandapoor. M. Bourquien, delighted at seeing a Frenchman, pressed me to remain with him for a few days. Having been absent from my native land five years, I could almost fancy myself back there in this corner of India. It was thus I became acquainted with the heroes of the true story I have just related. André, now a tall, handsome, young man, managed the factory, which had been rebuilt and enlarged, with the help of his brother-in-law, Captain Algernon, who had left the army and married Mdlle. Bertha Bourquien. Miana, liberated by the death of Hanouman, had been raised to the position of steward and major-domo over the numerous servants. As for Mali, he was now a poor,

feeble old man, spending his days sitting in the garden talking to Sâprani, the good cobra, who was still alive and alert.

One day, as I was talking with the old charmer, we saw M. Bourquien run across the wide avenue of the factory, followed by his grandchildren, whose merry laughter filled the grove; their mother, Bertha, walked behind them with a calm, happy look.

"And all that is your work!" said I to Mali, pointing to this charming picture of happiness and hope.

"No, sir," replied the charmer, "I have been but the humble instrument. He who sent the gloom has dispersed it, and the sun never shines so brightly as when its rays have pierced the clouds."



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